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'Palestinians stealing sand from Israel'

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Hundreds of trucks are transporting sand stolen from Israeli beaches to the Palestinian autonomous areas of the West Bank and Gaza for use in construction, the daily Yediot Aharonot said Sunday. "In recent months the phenomenon has reached a scale not seen before," the independent newspaper quoted Ravid Pik, an official from the Israeli department of national parks, as saying. "Every day, hundreds of trucks owned by Palestinians from East Jerusalem and Hebron (on the West Bank) are bringing to the autonomous Palestinian territories loads of sand to be used in construction and that were stolen in Israel," he added. "The thefts are generally perpetrated at night and without great risk. Sometimes, entire hills disappear in a few hours," he said. Mr. Pik mentioned one site where a gaping crater of several hundred metres had been found after 70,000 cubic metres of sand worth about \$330,000 had been taken.

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Oman to stop licensing foreign lawyers

MUSCAT (AFP) — Oman has decided to stop licensing foreign lawyers and has given their legal services three years to close, the official news agency reported on Sunday. Sultan Qaboos's decree said all foreign legal consultancy offices in Oman could operate for three years from the date of the new law's publication, the agency said. "The duration of the licences of foreign legal consultancy offices will continue for three years from the date of the publication of this law. Their licences should not be renewed afterwards," it said. Details of the new law would be published later by the Ministry of Islamic Affairs and Endowments, and it would be enforced from the date of publication in the official gazette, the agency said without giving the date. Like other Gulf states, Oman has launched a drive to lessen reliance on foreign labour, mostly Asian. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) this week enforced a new law banning foreign lawyers from appearing in court but allowing them to practice in their offices, which should be in partnership with national lawyers.

Turkish police arrest Islamic leader

ISTANBUL (AFP) — The head of one of Turkey's most extremist Islamic groups wanted by judicial authorities since October has been arrested, police said here Sunday. Muslim Gunduz was arrested by anti-terrorist police here Saturday on charges of insulting Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the founder of secular Turkey, and of having orchestrated a violent demonstration in mid-October in Ankara. Altogether 121 members of Mr. Gunduz's sect, known as Acazmeni, were detained under the terms of Turkey's anti-terrorist law in October for chanting slogans against the country's secular regime and resisting arrest.

Islamists want Kuwait as 'no-concert zone'

KUWAIT (R) — Five Islamist Kuwaiti deputies are seeking to ban concerts and fashion shows in the emirate, a parliament official said on Sunday. "The bill places a full ban on public concerts and fashion shows," the official said of the proposal signed by the five deputies. "It stipulates that violators of the ban should face up to a six-month prison term, a fine of no less than 5,000 dinars (\$16,700) and the closure of the facility used for holding a concert or a fashion show," said the official. The bill requires the approval of parliament and Emir Sheikh Jaber Al Ahmad Al Sabah before it becomes a law. Islamists have slammed the government for allowing concerts after stopping them for five years following the 1990-91 Iraqi occupation of Kuwait. Islamists object to women singing or vice versa and to women dressing attractively around unrelated men. A few Western-style fashion shows held recently also drew criticism. Kuwait already bans public dancing and alcohol. Discotheques were closed in the 1980s.

Arafat reports hurdles remain in Hebron deal

CAIRO (Agencies) — Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat said Sunday that "several difficulties" were blocking an agreement with Israel on an Israeli troop withdrawal from the West Bank city of Hebron. "The Hebron negotiations are facing several difficulties and Egyptian and American efforts are aimed at solving them," Mr. Arafat told reporters at Cairo airport before a meeting here with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. "These difficulties concern the right to hot pursuit, armaments (and) a buffer zone," Mr. Arafat said in a reference to security issues which he was to discuss later Sunday with Israeli Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai.

The Palestinian leader said other difficulties include "the date for the resumption of negotiations on the redeployment (from rural areas of the West Bank) and of negotiations on a final status (for the Palestinian territories)." He said he was in Cairo to inform Mr. Mubarak of these problems and seek his advice "because we are passing through a very delicate and critical phase."

Syria ready to resume talks with Israel where they left off — Sharaa

CAIRO (Agencies) — Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk Al Sharaa on Sunday said his country was willing to resume peace talks with Israel from the point they left off once an Israeli-Palestinian agreement on Hebron was reached. Mr. Sharaa was commenting on the possibility of an imminent agreement between Palestinian and Israeli negotiators on the long-delayed Israeli troop withdrawal from the West Bank town of Hebron. Asked if a Hebron accord would encourage Syria to resume negotiations with Israel frozen since February, the Syrian diplomat said: "We as Arabs are concerned by the peace process."

The Syrians, in a claim

Shaath. Mr. Buz said prior to the meeting he expected an agreement on an Israeli pullout from Hebron to be signed in the next few days. "This week will witness the signing of a Hebron accord as well as other issues concerning the Israeli redeployment (from rural areas) of the West Bank, the final status, the liberation of Palestinian prisoners and the opening of a port and airport in Gaza," Mr. Buz said. On Thursday, Mr. Arafat said he expected an accord on handing control of most of Hebron to the Palestinian National Authority to be reached before the New Year. Mr. Abbas said in Cairo on Saturday that "essential issues" had been solved and only some points concerning security remained to be ironed out.

U.S. mediator Dennis Ross is expected to return to the region on Monday to try to pin down an agreement between Israel and the Palestinians after three months of gruelling talks. An Israeli spokesman, Moshe Vogel, told AFP Sunday that Israel had rejected a Palestinian proposal that the two sides share responsibility for security at Hebron's Ibrahimi Mosque, a site sacred to Muslims and Jews which houses both a synagogue and a mosque. "Sharing responsibility for protection of the sacred site is out of the question because this would just create confusion and increase

(Continued on page 7)

corroborated by Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and some Israelis, say the previous Israeli government told them it could eventually return all of the Golan Heights. The Israeli government elected in May does not want to return any of the Golan. It says any withdrawal offer would have been purely oral and not binding. Israel broke off peace talks with Syria shortly after a round ended in the United States on March 1. Mr. Sharaa, speaking after meeting Mr. Mubarak, repeated his view that a Middle East peace process no longer exists. But he added: "Things will come clear during the coming week, I believe. We do not want to anticipate events but we have expressed our anxiety about certain matters which do not inspire optimism." He did not elaborate.

The minister said Lebanon and Syria feared Israel was preparing to attack them. The other Damascus Declaration states — Egypt and the six Gulf Arab states — had said they fully supported Lebanon and Syria, he added. The Syrian foreign minister, briefing the Egyptian president on a meeting of eight Arab countries Sun-

(Continued on page 7)

Regent visits Karak, stresses importance of regular meetings Crown Prince urges against 'culture of shame' that results in unemployment

AMMAN (J.T.) — His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan, the Regent, on Sunday toured Karak Governorate, where he met with people representing all walks of life in the governorate, and conveyed to them the greetings and best wishes of His Majesty King Hussein.

Addressing the audience, Prince Hassan said his visit comes in response to a request by King Hussein to visit Karak Governorate and inspect the conditions of people there. Prince Hassan congratulated the Christian clergymen who attended the meeting on the occasion of Christmas and New Year. The Crown Prince said that the visit provided him an opportunity to meet with a representative sample of the various tribes of Karak, and to visit the Karak Valley (Wadi Karak) where a project for cleaning up the valley, constructing dams and water reservoirs is being carried out with the aim of providing job opportunities in the agricultural sector for 10,000 citizens living in that area.



His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan, the Regent, poses for a photo with Karak residents during a visit he paid to the southern town on Sunday (Petra photo)

Prince Hassan said the aim of the visit was not only to pay a routine inspection tour, but also to renew the relations and links with the Karak tribes. Outlining the importance of such meetings and dialogue among members of the one Jordanian family,

Prince Hassan said they provide an opportunity for exchange of ideas and views and common concerns. Prince Hassan voiced hope that dialogue would be extended to include the various grass root committees and councils, in addition to representatives of the executive and legislative powers.

On the unemployment problem, Prince Hassan called not only for addressing the problem, but also for addressing what he called "the culture of shame," in an apparent ref-

erence to Jordanian graduates who refrain from taking up certain jobs in their quest to find "socially acceptable" jobs.

Prince Hassan voiced hope that the youth play a proactive role in the field by interacting with the people at the grass root level, and called for reviving the spirit of the Great Arab Revolt and for fostering its achievements.

Last Thursday, the Regent received at the Royal Court a delegation representing the Karak Development Corporation, the Karak municipal council and representatives of cultural institutions.

Addressing the delegation, Prince Hassan called for objective handling of such issues as unemployment. Prince Hassan called for establishing a counselling office to provide psychological advice to citizens who need such advice, and recalled in this regard the psychological condition of a young girl who lost her family last week in a tragic road accident which took place in Arafat in Saudi Arabia.

Damascus Declaration hits Iran for deploying missiles Eight Arab states commit themselves to joint defence against aggression

CAIRO (Agencies) — Eight Arab states on Sunday sharply criticised Iran's deployment of missiles on three disputed Gulf islands claimed by the United Arab Emirates (UAE), saying the action was a threat to Gulf countries.

The six members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), together with Syria and Egypt, issued a statement at the end of a two-day ministerial meeting to express their "strong concern about Iran's deployment of ground-to-ground missiles in the Arab Gulf, including the three occupied UAE islands."

Iran's action represents a "direct threat to the Gulf Cooperation Council countries and their strategic sites," the statement said, calling on Tehran to "abstain from all measures likely to compromise security and stability in the Gulf region."

It condemned what it said was Iranian persistence in imposing a fait accompli in the islands by force. The ministers affirmed their absolute support for all peaceful measures and means taken by the UAE to recover sovereignty over these islands.

Gulf states have previously complained that Iran has

U.S. urged to pressure Israel against settlement

THE DAMASCUS Declaration foreign ministers on Sunday asked the United States, as a sponsor of the Middle East peace process, to put financial pressure on Israel to stop settling Jews on occupied Arab territory. "The ministers...called on the United States to guarantee that American financial aid (to Israel) is not used in implementing the settlement policy," said the final statement, issued after a two-day meeting in Cairo. "They also urged the United States...to take necessary positions that would stop Israeli settlement expansion on occupied Arab lands," it added.

The ministers warned Israel it should not expect other states in the region to cooperate with it much until it withdraws from all occupied lands and allows the Palestinians to "attain their legitimate rights" — listed in the statement as establishing a Palestinian state that includes Arab East Jerusalem.

"The ministers underlined their support to Lebanon and Syria in facing Israeli provocations and threats aimed at...imposing a fait accompli on the Arabs," the final statement said. It did not elaborate.

of them, an Egyptian official said.

"In the event of armed aggression against a member country by an Arab or non-Arab nation, member states commit to taking immediately any individual or collective measure to repel the aggression," according to the document. Their commitment does not prevent any threatened country from taking mea-

leftist Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA). "Progress has been made to end this great incident," Mr. Palermo said just after the release. But armed rebels of the MRTA continued to hold 83 captives, including top Peruvian officials, diplomats and executives in the standoff that began Dec. 17.

Japanese executives who remain captive addressed a letter to Japan's Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto, urging Tokyo to press for their release.

Kabariti assures Tafleeh residents solutions to problems under way

TAFILEH (Petra) — Prime Minister Abdul Karim Kabariti on Sunday visited Tafleeh in southern Jordan and assured its residents that many of the problems facing them, including water, roads and land ownership issues, were being solved.

"We realise the immensity of the water problems facing Tafleeh. This problem will soon end because the government has taken the proper decisions and steps to draw water to the governorate from Al Hassa district in Karak Governorate," Mr. Kabariti told a public rally in the city.

"The government realises that industrial projects are few in Tafleeh governorate. We are about to purchase a suitable plot of land for the construction of an industrial city to offer the youth opportunities," said Mr. Kabariti.

Referring to land claims by bedouin tribes in the governorate, Mr. Kabariti said the government had created a special committee to examine the problem, hear complaints and demands and come up with solutions.

He said the committee was made up of the ministers of interior, public works and housing, youth, finance and prime ministry affairs.

The prime minister said the government plans to provide additional aid to the Tafleeh municipal

council.

Referring to unemployment in Tafleeh, Mr. Kabariti said people from the area "shun manual work at a time when thousands of non-Jordanians are employed in Tafleeh's various businesses."

He called on the local citizens to take the place of non-Jordanian workers. "The number of unemployed Jordanians is far less than the jobs now assumed by guest workers," he said.

He said that the government would launch the implementation of projects benefiting the needy in the next few months. He expressed hope that the jobs to be created would employ thousands of people.

Mr. Kabariti said the transportation problem in Tafleeh had caused many local residents to move to Amman. He said that the Tafleeh-southern Jordan valley highway was in its final stages. He also said that the local companies like the potash and phosphate firms will continue to employ people from Tafleeh.

Tafleeh Governor Nayef Injadat presented to the prime minister the local residents' demands. He urged the government to provide financial aid to the municipalities in the governorate to help them build

(Continued on page 7)

Direct contacts could bring end to Lima crisis closer

LIMA (Agencies) — An end to the 12-day hostage standoff at the Japanese ambassador's residence here seemed closer at hand Sunday after the government made its first direct contact with the captors, who released 20 more hostages.

Rebels released 20 hostages Saturday — including 10 executives of Japanese companies and the Malaysian and Dominican ambassadors — shortly after government negotiator Domingo Palermo ended a three-and-a-half hour meeting with the leader of the

"We are from the private sector, and therefore should be excluded from negotiations between the Peruvian government and the rebel group," it read.

The MRTA said it was willing to talk its way out of the standoff but "for that, it is important to reflect on why we reached this extreme situation, to look at the situation of the jails and the drama of the families of our jailed comrades."

The MRTA's principal demand is the release of some 440 of its jailed members, which President Alberto Fujimori flatly

rejected. In the statement the rebels repeated their desire for "an integral and durable peace" agreement with the government.

But Mr. Fujimori has refused to talk about a peace deal with the MRTA while it continues to hold hostages.

He did, however, open the possibility for rebels to negotiate their way out, stirring speculation they may be given free passage to a third country in return for the safe handover of the hostages.

A Japanese foreign min-

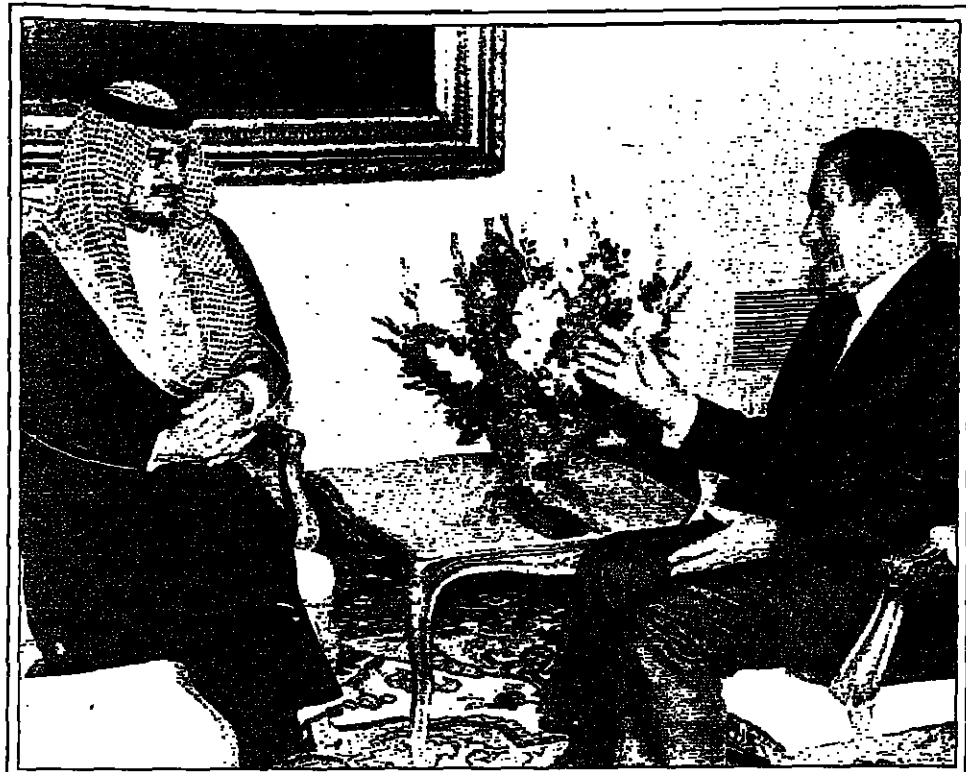
istry spokesman said its Ambassador Morihisa Aoki had also sent a message to his government.

"I am doing my best, hoping that the day when all the hostages are released will come as soon as possible," the spokesman quoted Mr. Aoki as saying in the message.

Mr. Palermo underscored that the release Saturday was a direct result of his talks with the group.

Until Saturday, talks had been conducted through Michel Minig of the

(Continued on page 7)



CAIRO TALKS: Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak (right) speaks with Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud Al Faisal during a meeting in Cairo on Sunday. Prince Faisal was in Cairo to attend a meeting for Arab foreign ministers from the eight Damascus Declaration states (Reuters photo)

Resettled Iraqi refugees find U.S. heartland cold and bewildering

LINCOLN, Nebraska (AFP) — Iraqi refugees resettled in this heartland city after years spent in Saudi desert camps say the language barrier and ignorance of American ways are frustrating their bid for integration into U.S. society.

In interviews conducted here through an interpreter, the mainly southern Iraqi refugees, including army defectors who arrived here earlier this year from Saudi Arabia, were at pains to insist that they do not regret their decision to settle in this midwestern city of 200,000.

"Our biggest problem is that we don't speak English yet. So we have trouble communicating with authorities. We feel lonely and misunderstood," Naima Al Zayda, a 26-year-old Iraqi air force defector, said as he and five other Iraqis sipped hot tea at a rented apartment.

Many of the new arrivals chose Lincoln because relatives or friends already here told them that jobs were easy to find.

"But most companies here don't speak English, so it's hard for U.S. to get jobs," said another Iraqi who asked not to be named.

Mr. Zayda was an Iraqi air force mechanic stationed in Nasiriyah, in southern Iraq during the Gulf war. During the revolt against Iraqi President Saddam Hussein which followed, he said he fled to Saudi Arabia, crossing the border which was then manned by U.S. troops.

"I spent six years in a Saudi desert camp. There was nothing to do except play soccer. And the Saudi

is were mean to us," he said.

Last September, he got a lucky break and was picked by visiting U.S. officials to join a group of refugees flown to the United States for resettlement.

All the refugees are processed in New York before picking their final destination.

Mr. Zayda said he chose to go Miami, Florida, where he stayed for one month but could not find work. So heading adrift from a friend, he came to Lincoln.

Mr. Zayda said he is looking for welding work but is willing to accept any job. He said he will under no circumstance return to Iraq.

On the same flight from Saudi Arabia was another Iraqi army defector, 25-year-old Hussain Marayda.

Although a Shiite from southern Iraq, Mr. Marayda was stationed at a northern army base in Dohuk near the Turkish border during the Gulf war. He said the base had been under repeated missile attacks from allied forces.

In early 1991, he said he escaped and made his way to Saudi Arabia, crossing the border along with many opponents of the regime rule with help from U.S. troops.

Mr. Marayda also speaks virtually no English and has not been able to find work so far.

Mark Franken, the New York-based director of the refugee programs run by the U.S. Catholic Conference said some 186 Iraqi refugees had been resettled in the Lincoln area over the past two years.

Under a separate pro-

gramme, the United States is also resettling several thousand Kurds from northern Iraq who fled an Iraqi assault earlier this year.

Mr. Franken said up to 7,000 are expected to be resettled in the United States, including 75 in Lincoln, by next fall.

A first group of Kurds arrived here in October from Guam after being evacuated from Turkey.

On arrival here, each refugee gets about \$332 a month in cash welfare assistance and food stamps.

Catholic Social Services, working under contract from government agencies, also helped the Iraqis find jobs and accommodation. In addition, the agency provides them with a week-long crash course on American culture.

The first Iraqis began arriving here four years ago and the community now numbers around 700, according to Mohammad Nassir, a U.S.-educated Iraqi mechanical engineering researcher at the University of Nebraska.

There are an estimated 250,000 Iraqis in the United States, he added.

Unlike wealthier and bigger Iraqi communities in Dearborn, Michigan, Saint Louis, Missouri, or Dallas, Texas, Lincoln Iraqis have no capital to start small businesses such as supermarkets or restaurants and they need government help, said Mr. Nassir, who is the community's unofficial spokesman.

They also need better police, health and administrative information, he added.

UAE tightens crackdown on illegal labour

ABU DHABI (AFP) — The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has decided to intensify inspection of foreign labour sites as part of a campaign to crack down on malpractices that have hit the labour market over the past decade.

Addressing inspectors late Saturday, Labour and Social Affairs Minister Saif Al Jarwan said the campaign was intended to ensure both employers and employees respected new labour and immigration laws.

"The ministry will step up inspection raids on labour sites after the expiry of the deadline for redressing the expatriate labour situation in the country. They will start at the beginning of the new year," he said.

Ministry sources said such raids targeted mostly Asians, who account for the bulk of the expatriate low-paid labour in the oil-rich emirates.

Most of them work in the construction sector as well as shops, garages, restaurants and other small enterprises and are mainly from India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Bangladesh and the Philippines.

The Ministry Of Labour has given them until the end of December to adjust to the new immigration laws by transferring their residence to their original sponsors and work only for them or leave the country.

More than 150,000 workers have managed to stay while thousands have left after failing to get jobs. Around 200,000 expatriates from the seven Asian countries have also gone home during a four-month amnesty this year for foreign migrants who had overstayed or entered the UAE illegally.

Asians form nearly half the UAE's population of 2.3 mil-

lion and more than two thirds of its 800,000-strong workforce. They started streaming into the emirates after oil was discovered in early 1960s.

Jarwan said the inspections would no longer be confined to periodic visits to labour sites.

"There will be surprise raids in the day and at night," he said. "We want to make sure they are sticking to the new laws concerning the sponsorship, wages, work hours and other job contracts."

"The raids will also target those labour places which recruit women and children illegally and which do not stick to safety regulations."

The UAE, which has one of the highest per capita incomes in the world, started this year enforcing harsher immigration laws in a bid to stem infiltration attempts by Asians and turmoil in the local labour market.

Illegal migrants now face up to three years in jail and a fine of 30,000 dirhams (\$8,147) while those who help them sneak in could get 15 years and a fine of between 15,000 and 100,000 dirhams (\$4,087-27,247).

Illegal migrants who have been saved from several months in jail and a large fine as the UAE levies 100 dirhams (\$27.2) for each overstayed day. Some of them had worked here for years and had been unable to go home for fear of prosecution.

UAE officials said most of those workers had been exploited by their employers in terms of wages, work hours, health and accommodation.

"No one could come and complain because they knew they would be jailed as they were staying in the country illegally," a Labour Ministry official said.

Iraq studies reopening museum

BAGHDAD (R) — Iraq is preparing for the eventual reopening of the Iraqi museum, which has been closed to the public since the 1990 Gulf war, a senior official said on Sunday.

"We are preparing studies on the (Iraqi) museum when conditions are right," he will reopen it," Muwaid Said, head of Iraq's archaeology department, told Reuters.

He said the studies concentrated on reviewing the galleries of the museum and the objects that would be put on show. The museum, with more than 250,000 archaeological items before the war, has been closed since the 1990-1991 Gulf crisis for the fear the contents could be damaged in fighting.

U.S. facilities in S. Arabia on high alert after more threats

RIYADH (AFP) — U.S. facilities in Saudi Arabia remained on a high state of alert on Sunday after the embassy received reports that more anti-American bombings might be carried out in the kingdom.

"The embassy continues to receive unverified reports suggesting the possibility of further attacks on U.S. interests in Saudi Arabia," the embassy said in a recorded telephone message updated in the last week.

"There have also been public statements threatening additional attacks against American military forces. Other reports are more general in nature," the message said.

In an interview last month with an Arabic daily, dissident Saudi Osama Ben Laden urged European countries to withdraw their troops from the Gulf before the guerrilla war he declared against the United States "erupts."

In its message, the embassy said it "urges the entire American community to continue to exercise extreme caution in matters concerning personal security."

"Americans should keep a low profile, reduce travel within the kingdom and treat mail from unfamiliar sources with suspicion. U.S. facilities remain at high states of alert," it said.

It urged individuals to report any suspicious activity or vehicles.

The statement was the 32nd update that the U.S. embassy has given its citizens in Saudi Arabia this year. There are more than 30,000 U.S. businessmen, professionals and workers in Saudi Arabia, and around 6,000 U.S. troops.

A June 25 truck-bombing killed 19 Americans at a military housing complex near Dhahran, Saudi Arabia. A car bomb on Nov. 13, 1995 killed five Americans and two Indians at a U.S.-Saudi training centre in Riyadh.

Four Saudi Islamic militants were beheaded in May for the first bombing, but the investigation into the second bombing is continuing.

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Egypt arrests up to 200 militants of new group named after Seyyed Qotb

CAIRO (Agencies) — The Egyptian authorities have arrested up to 200 members of a new Muslim fundamentalist group seeking to set up an Islamic state in Egypt, police sources and the government press said on Sunday.

Police sources identified the new group as Al Qutbiyyun and said it was named after Seyyed Qotb, the supreme ideologist of the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood of which the new movement was said to be a splinter group.

"The militants uphold Seyyed Qotb's ideology which calls for incitement to change the current government and set up an Islamic nation (in Egypt)," one source said.

The authorities seized several documents outlining the group's ideology and encouraging Muslims to overthrow the current government, police sources said. The group was being financed by the Muslim Brotherhood.

Qutb, famous for his polemical work "Signposts on the Path", died in prison in 1966 during the long persecution of the Brotherhood

by President Gamal Abdel Nasser.

The group, in line with Qutb's teachings, believes Egyptian society is in a state of pre-Islamic "ignorance" and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak is an infidel, Al Ahram added.

Al Ahram said the public prosecutor wanted to question a member of parliament from the opposition Labour Party, Ali Sayyed Fah Al Bah, in connection with this group.

The prosecutor may ask parliament to lift his immunity so that he can undergo interrogation, it added.

The Labour Party contains many members of the Brotherhood, which has been repeatedly denied legal recognition either as a political party or in any other form.

For many years the state largely tolerated the Brotherhood, a large and influential organisation, but for the past two years it has tried to equate it with the violent groups trying to overthrow the government by force. Brotherhood leaders say they oppose the use of violence

for political ends.

The arrests of "more than 190" suspects took place two days ago in several provinces across Egypt, including Cairo, the sources added.

The government daily Al Ahram reported on Sunday that 200 suspected militants had been arrested in nine provinces.

Neither Al Ahram nor the police sources identified the suspects but the government daily described them as "important members" of the new group.

An initial investigation revealed that Al Qutbiyyun was set up as a secret organisation on the lines of the Muslim Brotherhood and recruited mostly young people, Al Ahram reported.

Al Ahram also reported that the security forces had foiled a plot by the Muslim Brotherhood to recruit a female fundamentalist network charged with carrying messages "back and forth" between jailed militants.

The authorities also seized a number of pamphlets and documents, some of which contained "military information."

Finds in Syria show Neanderthal man was pioneer in use of tar

PARIS (AFP) — Neanderthal man could have been a pioneer in the use of tar more than 40,000 years ago, or 300 centuries before our human ancestors, scientists believe.

The new discoveries in Syria are recounted in the latest edition of the French atomic energy commission's monthly publication challenges.

Archaeologists working on a site at Umm Al Tlel in the Al Kowm basin found flakes of flint partly covered in bitumen, which experts believe could have

been used as a glue to stick the flint to some sort of handle.

The finds were dated by radiological means to around 40,000 B.C., the end of the Paleolithic era. Previously bitumen was not thought to have been used for any purpose before about 8,000 B.C.

Just as importantly, microscopic examination revealed that not only had the tar been heated before use, but its origin was not local.

This indicated that its prehistoric artisans travelled widely, and possibly traded in raw materials, either with other Neanderthal communities or with the ancestors of modern man who were beginning to appear on the scene.

The findings could be one more piece in the jigsaw puzzle of Neanderthal man, whose first skeleton was found just over 140 years ago in a cave in Germany.

At first dismissed as big brutes who died out because they did not have the brainpower to compete

with home sapiens, they became somewhat more acceptable when it was discovered that they buried their dead.

Since then, a whole series of discoveries in Europe, the Middle East and Asia have revealed that Neanderthals and modern man shared the same world for thousands of years before the former finally disappeared.

After long resisting the fact, experts now believe that our blood today contains more than a dash of Neanderthal ancestry.

One find of a particularly well-preserved skull at Kebra in Israel showed that neanderthal man was capable of articulated speech.

One of the most significant discoveries, made in France in 1990 but only recently made public, was of an artificial arrangement, at least 47,000 years old, of stalactites and stalagmites in a cave which suggested that Neanderthals had some sort of spiritual beliefs.

JORDAN TELEVISION

Tel. 773111-19

PROGRAMME TWO

14:05 The Muppet Show
14:30 Comedy — Dad's Army
16:00 Doc. — Nature's Inventions
16:30 Comedy — Hey Dad
17:00 News Flash
17:02 Documentary
17:15 Drama — Dalton
18:00 Magazine — Cinq Sur Cinq
19:00 Le Journal
19:15 Magazine — Cinq Sur Cinq
19:30 News Headlines
19:35 Roseanne
20:00 Documentary — Disaster Chronicle
20:30 Cinema, Cinema
21:10 The Lazarus Man
22:00 News in English
22:25 Best Seller — Devices & Desires
23:15 Police drama — The Knock

PRAYER TIMES

05:08 Fajr
06:30 (Sunrise) Duha
11:38 Dhuhur
14:44 'Asr
16:45 Maghreb
18:07 Isha

CHURCHES

St. Mary of Nazareth Church
Sweithel. Tel. 810740
Assemblies of God Church Tel.
632785.
St. Joseph Church Tel. 624590

Church of the Annunciation

Tel. 637440.

De la Salle Church Tel. 661757.

Terra Sancta Church Tel. 622366

Anglican Church Tel. 652826.

Armenian Catholic Church Tel.

771331.

Armenian Orthodox Church

Tel. 775261.

St. Ephraim Church Tel. 771751.

Amman International Church

Tel. 827126

Evangelical Lutheran Church

Tel. 824328.

German-speaking Evangelical

Congregation Tel. 845457

The Latter-Day Saints Tel.

654932.

Church of Nazareth Tel.

675691.

The Evangelical Local Church

in Amman Tel. 811295

English-speaking

Latin Catholics Parish Tel.

614190.

WEATHER

Bulletin supplied by the

Department of Meteorology

Under the continued effect of

the cold air mass, it will be

cold with skies cloudy to partly

cloudy. Scattered showers

are expected with winds westerly

active. During the day, the

effect of the cold air mass will

diminish. Skies will become

partly cloudy and winds south-

easterly moderate. On Tues-

day, it will be sunny with tem-

peratures expected to rise. In

JORDAN TIMES DAILY GUIDE AND CALENDAR

Agaba, skies will be sunny, winds northerly moderate, and seas calm.

Min./Max. temp. 05/13

Amman 10/22

Agaba 04/16

Deserts 04/16

Jordan Valley 11/21

Yesterday's high temperatures:

Amman 11, Agaba 20 Humid-

ity readings: Amman 92 per

cent, Agaba 47 per cent.

USEFUL

TELEPHONE

NUMBERS

NIGHT DUTY

AMMAN:

Dr. Issam Al Asmar

890504

Dr. Abdul Rahim Mustafa 744685

Dr. Khalidoun Kloub 816715

Dr. Nidal Al As'ad 751672

Ferdows pharmacy 637055

Naioukh pharmacy 623672

Al Salam pharmacy 636730

Yacoub pharmacy 644945

Shmeisani pharmacy 637660

Naioukh pharmacy

Najib pharmacy 847632

IRBID:

Dr. Ahmad Qanu 281484

Al Quds pharmacy (—)

ZARQA:

Dr. Randa Shahin 995170

Khalifeh pharmacy 985417

AKLEH MATERNITY 642441/2

Jabal Amman Maternity 642362

Malhas, J. Amman 636140

Palestine, Shmeisani 607071

Shmeisani Hospital 669131

University Hospital 848845

Al-Muhsen Hospital 667227/9

The Islamic, Abdali 666126/57

Al-Ahli, Abdali 664164/65

Italian, Al-Muhajreen 777101/3

Al-Bashir 775111/26

Army, Marka 891611/15

Queen Alia Hospital 602240/50

Amal Hospital 674155

The Arab Centre for Heart and

Special Surgery 865199

ZARQA:

Zarqa Govt. Hospital

(09)983323

Zarqa National Hospital

(09)900560

Ibn Sina Hospital (09)986732

Prince visits JPMC headquarters

AMMAN (J.T.) — HRH Prince Raed Ben Zeid Sunday visited the headquarters of the Jordan Phosphate Mines Company (JPMC) and urged management there to ensure that two per cent of company employees have been employed from among the handicapped.

The Prince also emphasised the need to apply specialised provisions in the national building code which stipulate that facilities be provided to facilitate movement for the disabled.

He also suggested that special computer sets for the blind be introduced as well as special arrangements to prevent occupational injuries in the mines.

Dead Sea table salt slated for market

AMMAN (Petra) — The Jordanian Dead Sea Industries Company (JDSIC) will begin to market table salt extracted from the Dead Sea in the second half of January, according to a JDSIC announcement Sunday.

Company Manager Awni Ammarin said that the production plant was recently constructed and that preliminary salt production has been successfully conducted.

Man faces manslaughter charges in child's death

By Rana Hussein
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — A 45-year-old man, who tied up his nine-year-old son with ropes and chains to teach him a lesson was transferred Sunday to court on manslaughter charges, police officials said.

According to police officials, Khalid M., a Syrian national, bound his son's hands, legs and neck to a wooden board with ropes and chains in a room in his factory in Zarqa, then locked the door and went to his house.

The report said the father then began a search for his son, espied him descending from a bus, grabbed him, took him to the factory and tied him up.

Universities sign foreign exchange agreements

AMMAN (J.T.) — The University of Central Florida (UCF) in the United States Sunday signed four agreements with the Higher Council for Science and Technology (HCST) and the Royal Scientific Society (RSS) regarding student and expert exchanges over the next four years.

According to Dean of the Princess Sumaya University College of Technology (PSUCT) Dr. Mohammad Qaryouti, whose institution is affiliated with the RSS, the first and second agreements provide for cooperation with expert exchanges and training in different academic fields.

He said the following general terms of cooperation will be pursued under the two agreements:

- An exchange of undergraduate and/or graduate students.
- An exchange of faculty members and/or research scholars.
- Joint research activities.
- An exchange of scientific materials and information.

New telephone system provides succour for telecommunications

By Nadia Mukhlis
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — In the last few months Amman has been witnessing changes in telephone numbers, due to the May opening of a new telephone exchange in Tla' Al Ali, telecommunications officials said.

The telecommunications Corporation, which was transformed into a fully government-owned shareholding company called the Jordanian Telecommunications Corporation, signed a deal in March with the French telecommunications company, Alcatel, to open a

new telephone exchange to support the existing one, considered over-loaded, by providing new telephone numbers with seven digits to subscribers in western Amman.

The Jordanian Telecommunications Corporation (JTC) was registered on Oct. 8, 1996 with a reported capital of JD 2.5 million. Minister of Post and Communications Jamal Sarairah told the Jordan Times.

The anterior six-digit telephone exchange system could serve a hypothetical one million lines, telecommunications officials said.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Public institutions to close for New Year's day

AMMAN (Petra) — All ministries, government departments and public institutions will close on Wednesday in observance of New Year's Day, according to a statement issued by Prime Minister Abdul Karim Kabariti.

Public security officers depart for Angola

AMMAN (Petra) — Public Security Department (PSD) Director Lt. General Nasouh Muhieddin Sunday bade farewell to a new team of public security officers, who will be leaving for Angola today. Addressing the officers, Lt. Gen. Muhieddin opined that Jordan has acquired a good international reputation which qualifies the Kingdom to participate in international peace keeping forces. He called on them to discharge their duties as best they can and to live up to the expectations accorded them.

A total of 699 road accidents counted in one week

AMMAN (Petra) — A total of 8 persons were killed and 257 injured in 699 road accidents which took place during the one-week period of Dec. 14 to Dec. 21, according to traffic department sources. The sources said that 29 per cent of the road accident victims were aged 10-20 years, followed by the 20-30 age group, which accounted for 23 per cent of the victims. The sources blamed tailgating as the prime cause of accidents, followed by a failure to give way, taking the wrong lane, and wrongful passing in addition to failing to give pedestrians priority.

WHAT'S GOING ON

PLAYS

* Two plays entitled "The City of Sawsanah" and "The Three Comrades" at the Royal Cultural Centre at 6:00 p.m.

BOOK LAUNCHING

* Reception at the Amman Bookshop (5:00 p.m. — 7:00 p.m.) launching the book "Modern Art in Jordan."

EXHIBITIONS

- * Products of the Jordan Design and Trade Centre of Noor Al Hussein Foundation at the Movenpick Hotel, Petra, until Jan. 10.
- * "Special show and sale of Christmas crafts at the Jordan Crafts Centre (Alaydi), Jabal Amman, Second Circle (Tel. 644555), until Dec. 31.
- * Christmas special at the Jordan River Designs showroom (hand-made ornaments and decoration), Jabal Amman, First Circle (Tel. 613081/2), until Dec. 31.
- * Exhibition of colourful gifts and crafts designed by Andrea Atalla at the Jordan Design and Trade Centre of Noor Al Hussein Foundation, Wadi Saqra Street (Tel. 699141/2), until Jan. 10.
- * Works by several artists entitled "The Artist and the Environment" by several artists at Alia Art Gallery, Jabal Amman, until Dec. 30.
- * Works of small paintings by Jordanian and Arab artists at Baladna Art Gallery, Gardens St. (Tel. 687598), until Jan. 14.
- * Works by Spanish painter Clara Amado at Instituto Cervantes, Jabal Amman until 15 Jan.
- * Works by ten contemporary Indonesian artists entitled "From Scripts to Abstraction" at the Jordan National Gallery of Fine Arts (open daily except Tuesdays), until Jan. 12.
- * Painting exhibition by Hind Nasser at the Jordan Arts and Crafts Centre/Artsana, Jabal Amman (Tel. 647858), until Jan. 10. Also displaying a regular exhibition of arts and crafts and Christmas items.
- * Display of Christmas gift items at the Bani Hamida House, Jabal Amman (Tel. 658696/7) until Jan. 2.
- * Works by Rula Al Shuqairi at Darat Al Funun, Jabal Weibdeh, until Jan. 4. Also displaying works by contemporary Arab artists.

'Dialogue of Options' ends with focus on democratic path

AMMAN (J.T.) — A week-long conference titled "A Dialogue of Options" organised by the Jordan Writers Association (JWA) ended in Amman Saturday with participants overwhelmingly calling for Jordan to adopt and pursue the path of democracy as the sole and inevitable choice.

Former Minister of Information Ibrahim Izzeddin submitted a report to the final session calling on government authorities to address social issues such as poverty, unemployment and corruption.

Prosecution in Ajloun case calls for full conviction

By Rana Hussein
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Military prosecution, in the case of three men from Ajloun accused of plotting sabotage, Sunday asked the State Security Court to indict all three.

Ikremah Mahmoud, 28, Yousef Ahmad, 27, and Ali Mahmoud, 27, have been formally charged with plotting to carry out extremist attacks and possessing illegal explosives with illicit intent.

The crimes these men have committed target the country's security as well as innocent lives and call for a full conviction. Military Prosecutor Captain Mahmoud Hyasat said in his closing argument.

In a Dec. 7 court trial, the defendants claimed that the landmines they collected in 1995 were intended to protect themselves in case of an Israeli invasion and that they "had no intention to terrorise any Jordanian or foreign resident."

At the end of the court session, the defence attorneys asked the court for time to prepare closing arguments in the case.

The court tribunal, comprised of Justices Yousef Faouri, Na'el Massadeh and Ahmad Ayash, agreed and postponed the case to Jan. 4.

Civic society to be debated at RCC

AMMAN (J.T.) — Under the patronage of Prime Minister Abdul Karim Kabariti, "Civic Society and Parliamentary Election Law" will be discussed at the Royal Cultural Centre from January 5th to the 7th.

The prime minister will open the session next Sunday with a speech, to be followed by a roundtable discussion with the slated participation of 14 political parties.

The event, organised by the Riadeh Centre for Information and Studies and Yarmouk University, will be open to the public.

The Embassy's new phone numbers will be: **5524680-8.**

P.O. Box 950866, Amman 11195

The Consulate will reopen and resume its work in the new premises on Sunday 5/1/1997.

Office hours: Sunday till Thursday, from 09:00 till 13:00 hrs.

The Consulate's new phone numbers will be: **5525170-5**

Due to moving to its permanent premises, at 47 Maysaloun Street - Rabiya, the Israeli Embassy will be closed on Wednesday and Thursday, 1-2/1/1997. The Embassy will resume its operations in its new premises on Sunday 5/1/1997.

Yugoslav opposition to continue protests despite freeze and police

BELGRADE (AFP) — Undeterred by sub-zero temperatures and heavy-handed police intervention, the Serbian opposition is determined to continue its daily protests, the Democratic Party said Sunday.

The Democratic Party is one of three members of the opposition Together Coalition which has held relentless mass rallies since mid-November over the authorities' refusal to recognise opposition gains in local election results.

Central Belgrade was calm Sunday morning under a blanket of snow ahead of the opposition rally, set to begin at the usual time of 3 p.m. (1400 GMT).

Saturday's protest was suspended to allow people to attend the funeral of Predrag Starcevic, 39, the first demonstrator to die since the protests started 41 days ago.

Starcevic, a teacher, died after being swept up in a violent clash between government supporters and opposition protesters at rival rallies Tuesday.

The leaders of the Together Coalition — Vuk Draskovic, Zoran Djindjic and Vesna Petic — were among the thousands of mourners at the funeral.

After the ceremony, the crowds moved towards the city centre chanting "Slobo

assassin!" in a reference to Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic, whose resignation the opposition has called for.

The Serbian Interior Ministry has begun to crack down on the opposition protests this week, saying that they snarl up traffic. Serried ranks of riot police have been deployed over the last few days, and on Friday, about 30 people, including passers-by, were injured in police baton charges.

Belgrade University students, who hold their own separate daily marches, turned out to protest Saturday evening in the centre of the city, in temperatures of minus 10 degrees Celsius (14 degrees Fahrenheit).

Stopped from marching into the city centre, the students walked round and round in a pedestrian street with their hands on their heads like prisoners taking exercise.

The opposition received a significant boost Friday when an international fact-finding mission backed their claims that last month's election results were rigged by the Serbian authorities.

A team from the Organisation of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), said the opposition was the true winner in 14 Serbian

towns and cities — together had said it had won 15 out of 18 major towns and cities in the Nov. 17 polls.

The OSCE urged Mr. Milosevic to respect the results. In a first reaction, Yugoslav Foreign Minister Milan Milutinovic said that the findings were "well intended and constructive."

Meanwhile, Together said that they would boycott any election reruns in Serbia's second town of Nis, where the Electoral Commission in the industrial city of Nis has refused to confirm an opposition victory in defiance of the OSCE findings.

Meanwhile, Yugoslav President Zoran Djindjic has called for political dialogue to end the impasse between the government and the opposition, in a New Year's address carried by Tanjug News Agency Sunday.

"Political issues, disagreements and differences of opinions can only be successfully resolved... within the framework of institutions elected by the popular will," Mr. Djindjic said.

"No authority takes precedence over the popular will," Mr. Djindjic said, adding: "Only political dialogue can serve to strengthen institutions."

Without specifying whom he was referring to, Mr. Djindjic attacked "Attempts to place, by all means, the

interests of individuals or a group above the interests of the people."

Mr. Djindjic holds the largely figurehead post of president of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which comprises Serbia and Montenegro.

In a separate development, Mr. Draskovic deplored Athens' lack of support for demonstrators fighting the Serbian government's refusal to recognise opposition victories.

"We are not satisfied with the Greek government's position concerning the actions of Slobodan Milosevic," said Mr. Draskovic in an interview with the daily Greek Angeloforos newspaper published Saturday.

"We expect greater political support from the Greek government to help our country move towards democracy and to condemn (Milosevic's) dictatorial regime," said Mr. Draskovic.

Greece, which defended the Serbian cause in the Yugoslav conflict and has repeatedly stated its ambition to play a leading role in the Balkans, has so far kept quiet on the anti-government protests that have shaken Belgrade for the past six weeks.

In 1993 the former Greek government helped free Mr. Draskovic and his wife after they were arrested by Serbian authorities.



Two masked Belgrade students stand in front of a riot police cordon during another protest march against Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic in Belgrade Saturday. Police used tougher tactics with the students who tried to march down a major downtown street after nightfall, swiftly diverting them into a pedestrian lane and trapping them there (Reuters photo)

31 hurt in Algiers bomb blast amid fears of Ramadan unrest

ALGIERS (AFP) — A bomb exploded at a cafe in a residential suburb of eastern Algiers Sunday wounding 31 people in the fourth bomb attack in a week on the capital, witnesses and doctors said.

The blast went off at the Hafs Cafe near a local government building in the residential El Harrach area, witnesses added.

Doctors at the Zmirli Hospital, in the poor district where fundamentalists are known to be active, said 31 people had been wounded.

Security services said in a statement that 20 people had been wounded, adding the attack had taken place inside the cafe itself.

The new attack comes in the run-up to the Muslim holy fasting month of Ramadan which this year will begin around Jan. 10 in Algeria and has already led to heightened tensions in the capital.

About 15 people have already been killed and

around 200 wounded in the past week, amid fears of a repetition of the unrest which has marred Ramadan in previous years. Islamic militants believe the period is fortuitous for a jihad, or holy war.

Three of the attacks have targeted popular cafes in the city centre and suburbs where leaflets have been distributed calling on women to wear the traditional Islamic veil or hijab when they go out, and urging men not to smoke.

On Friday 12 people, including a two-year-old girl, were hurt when a bomb exploded in a cafe, in a south eastern suburb outside the capital.

On Thursday a powerful car bomb killed 10 people and injured 68 others in a working-class district of the Algerian capital, according to an official toll.

On Monday, suspected Islamic fundamentalists

struck a crowded street in central Algiers with another car bomb attack, killing at least three people and injuring some 20 others.

Armed Islamic Groups have stuck leaflets on the city walls, ordering the population to dress correctly and pray regularly and threatening punishment against those who ignore the threats, witnesses and newspapers said.

Islamic fundamentalists have been waging an anti-government campaign since the cancellation of elections in 1992 which the now outlawed Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) were poised to win.

More than 50,000 people are thought to have died in the violence, according to Western estimates.

However, Algerian authorities have insisted that they have quashed the militants and that there is only "residual terrorism" left.

Indonesia riots leave more than 100 buildings damaged

JAKARTA (AP) — Indonesian troops remained on guard Sunday in a west Java town where riots last week did millions of dollars of damage to more than 100 buildings, reports said.

Traffic police worked the streets of Tasikmalaya accompanied by soldiers following the rampage by a Muslim mob against mainly Christian targets last Thursday. At least four people were killed.

"Soldiers still assist us in keeping order but they number much less than yesterday," Tasikmalaya's district spokesman Asep Rashid said by telephone. He could not say whether troops dispatched from various surrounding towns and the provincial capital, Bandung, had been withdrawn.

Security authorities were holding 120 people following the riots, the Jakarta Post said Sunday.

West Java military spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Herman Ibrahim was quoted as saying the military were still holding 78 people suspected of being connected with the rioting, while police were holding 24 people in Tasikmalaya and 18 in nearby Ciawi, the daily said.

But military officials in

Tasikmalaya said the army had turned over all detainees to the police. The town's police chief could not be reached for confirmation while his staff declined comment.

Thousands of Muslims began rioting after a protest against alleged police brutality against three local Islamic teachers. Up to 3,000 troops and riot police were deployed to quell the unrest.

Reports said more than 100 buildings and 116 vehicles were damaged in Tasikmalaya, with the Kompas daily putting the cost at 50 billion rupiah (\$21 million).

"The riot in Tasikmalaya Thursday caused damage to 13 places of worship (churches), 89 shops, 12 police stations, four factories, four schools, six banks and three hotels," said the head of Tasikmalaya district W.H. Suljana, the Antara news agency reported.

He said four churches, 43 shops, four factories, one school, two hotels, three banks and three police stations were destroyed by fire. Mr. Suljana gave no estimate for the value however.

The agency said rioters also set fire to or stoned 76 cars and 40 motorcycles,

adding that most of the vehicles attacked by rioters were those on display in car dealerships.

A provisional list of damage compiled by the Tasikmalaya district authorities said that 12 churches, three banks, eight car dealerships, four factories, 48 shops, 107 cars and 22 motorcycles were burned or damaged during the riot, the Republika daily said.

The official death toll rose by one to four after it was found that a 34-year-old shop owner died of a heart attack while his shop was under attack, the Antara news agency said. The other fatalities included an ethnic Chinese woman.

Cleaning up operations ended Sunday, Mr. Rashid said.

A joint operation involving thousands of people from the armed forces, the police, Islamic students and other citizen groups had Saturday begun cleaning up the debris, boarding up burned and damaged shops and painting over graffiti left by rioters or scribbled to ward off the mobs.

A resident source said that the main Zainal Mustofa Street which was hardest hit by the riot, had Sunday been reopened again to traffic.

20 people reported missing after ship capsizes in Greek waters

ATHENS (AFP) — Greek authorities stepped up a search for 20 people missing Sunday after high winds caused a Greek freighter to capsize off the coast of the eastern peninsula of Evvoia.

The Merchant Marine Ministry said.

Only one of the crew, an 18-year-old cadet, has been found after he jumped from the boat and launched distress flares when the Distos cargo-ship carrying 21 people overturned late Saturday.

Two warships with a team

of divers, two military helicopters and three harbour police patrol boats, backed by a dozen boats and trawlers were Sunday searching for 17 crew, as well as two women and a 10-year-old girl, relatives of officers on board, the source said.

Rescuers, hampered in their search by strong winds, feared the missing may have been trapped below deck as the ship turned completely over in winds gusting at Force 9.

The vessel, loaded with 5.3 tonnes cement, was on its way from Volos, north of Evvoia, to Piraeus, the port of Athens. On Sunday its hull could be seen above water three kilometres off the Evvoia peninsula.

An argument has broken out between the navy and the Merchant Marine Ministry over possible delays in the rescue operation, according to the ministry.

The crew did not signal for help, and authorities were only alerted after a Spanish radar station received a distress signal automatically set off by contact with water.

China hails Russian ties as a stand against U.S. domination

BEIJING (AFP) — China Sunday hailed Premier Li Peng's visit to Moscow this week as a breakthrough in its efforts to unseat the United States as the world's sole superpower.

In an official Xinhua News Agency editorial carried by all major newspapers, Beijing said Premier Li held "in-depth discussions" with Russian President Boris Yeltsin on "the formation of a multi-polar world."

"The establishment and development of a strategic partnership between Russia and China is conducive to the multi-polarisation of the world and to the establishment of a just and fair international economic and political order," the editorial said.

"Both China and Russia are important countries with great influence in the world and they well deserve to be two important and independent poles," it added.

Sino-U.S. relations have been strongly affected by the collapse of the Soviet Union, and China accuses the United States of underestimating its strategic importance now that the cold war triangle of power between Washington, Moscow and Beijing has been broken.

Although ties between Beijing and Washington are currently improving, the upswing is only recent, and both China and Russia have been making positive overtures towards each other in recent months.

"China's number one aim is to weaken the power of the United States," said David Shambaugh, professor of political science and international affairs at America's George Washington University.

"The United States is the most troublesome country to China's aspirations to change the world order and establish itself as the Asian power," he added.

China's premier returned from Moscow Saturday after being the first foreign leader to meet with Mr. Yeltsin since he returned to work after heart surgery.

The editorial said Mr. Yeltsin and Mr. Li "made it clear that they do not favour a world dominated by one power."

"A country's internal affairs should be dealt with by its own people and international issues should be handled with the equal participation of the international community," it added, in a clear jibe at Washington.

Both nations — which were deeply divided by a three-decade ideological split — hailed the visit as warm and fruitful, with agreements reached on the transfer of military technology, nuclear energy and finance.

Mr. Li's visit also marked the official start of regular meetings with his counterpart Viktor Chernomyrdin, which are similar to those the latter holds with U.S. Vice-President Al Gore.

In a further sign of the importance both sides attach to rapidly improving relations, Mr. Chernomyrdin announced he would travel to Beijing in the second quarter of 1997, in addition to the state visit of Chinese President Jiang Zemin to Russia in April.

China and Russia first developed close ties in the 1950s when Moscow took on the role of Beijing's big brother, and sent thousands of experts to rebuild China's war-shattered bureaucracy, military and heavy industry along Stalinist lines.

But their anti-Western alliance started to crumble in the early 1960s and the Sino-Soviet split lasted through the 1980s, until the two governments put aside their ideological rift in 1989.

North Korean apology over submarine satisfies Seoul

SEOUL (R) — North Korea apologised for the first time Sunday for an incursion by one of its submarines into South Korea in September, expressing "deep regret" in a statement that was hammered out with U.S. diplomats.

The brief statement carried by the official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) and Pyongyang Radio promised no repetitions of the incident.

Seoul cautiously welcomed the apology and said it opened the way to talks aimed at securing a lasting peace to replace a truce that ended the 1950-53 Korean War.

But independent analysts in South Korea said they doubted Pyongyang was sincere, and some called it a desperate gambit to get food aid from the United States.

Underlining such scepticism, the KCNA carried the apology at the end of a series of stories blasting "U.S. imperialists" and calling South Korean President Kim Young-Sam a "ruthless tyrant," "puppet" and "traitor."

The Shark-class submarine landed 26 heavily-armed North Koreans after running aground on an east coast beach, sparking a manhunt involving 60,000 troops, helicopters and dogs.

Twenty-four infiltrators were shot dead — 11 in an apparent mass suicide. One was captured and one is missing. A number of southern troops and civilians were also killed.

"The spokesman of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the DPRK (North Korea) is authorised to express deep regret for the submarine incident in the coastal waters of Kangnung, South Korea, in September, 1996, that caused the tragic loss of human life," the statement

said. "The DPRK will make efforts to ensure that such an incident will not recur and will work with others for durable peace and stability on the Korean peninsula."

The statement was issued after intense bargaining in New York between U.S. and North Korean envoys on a choice of words to make the apology acceptable to Seoul, which branded the incursion a "military provocation."

North Korea had earlier vowed "merciless retaliation" and demanded the return of the bodies and submarine. It originally said the vessel drifted South with engine trouble.

The row left the Korean peninsula crackling with military tension, froze international food aid to hungry North Korea and threatened a landmark 1994 accord that halted Pyongyang's nuclear weapons programme.

"North Korea's apology statement is short and has indirect expressions, not answering fully to the damage and pain caused to South Korean people," South Korea's Yonhap news agency quoted Foreign Minister Yu Chong-Ha as saying.

"However, it has the three key points of the demand — acknowledgement, apology, and promise to prevent recurrence."

Mr. Yu said although Pyongyang had called for economic sanctions to be eased, Seoul believed North Korea should not be rewarded for its apology, Yonhap said.

Negotiations on repatriating the remains of the 24 crewmen would now open through "appropriate channels," Mr. Yu said.

Earlier, a government statement welcomed the apology as the price for

resuming contacts with the North and giving it nuclear reactors promised under the 1994 agreement.

It said there was now hope for peace talks proposed by South Korea and the United States with the North and China.

"We hope that North Korea will use this opportunity to work for peace and stability on the Korean peninsula and will respond earnestly to our efforts to improve South-North relations," it added.

The apology "suggests North Korea will regard the four-way talks positively," analysts in Seoul were cautious, calling the apology a grudging response to U.S. badgering. Famine is looming in North Korea and the country is desperate for help.

It was not clear whether Washington secured the apology with any promises of aid or diplomatic recognition.

"It doesn't look too good," said Rhee Sang-Woo, a political science professor at Sogang University.

"North Korea has excluded South Korea and worked the apology out with the U.S. We have won on the content, but lost in the format. North Korea has succeeded in defying the South's sovereignty," he said.

North Korea's unswerving strategy has been to drive a wedge between Seoul and Washington and sign a bilateral peace agreement with the United States.

Even though it was the first time Pyongyang has officially apologised over outrages against the South, it was a low-cost gesture since the apology would never be heard by ordinary North Koreans, analysts said.

OAU leader calls on Africans to end conflicts

ADDIS ABABA (R) — The secretary-general of the Organisation of African Unity appealed Sunday for Africans to end their conflicts, saying the standard of living in the continent had continued to fall in 1996.

In a year-end message from the OAU Addis Ababa headquarters, Mr. Salim Ahmed Salim characterised 1996 as a mixture of advances in development and despair caused by more carnage and blood-letting.

"Although a number of our countries witnessed an overall improvement in their economic growth, the socio-economic performance of the continent as a whole has been poor in 1996," Mr. Salim said.

"The standard of living of our people continued to deteriorate as a result of increasing poverty in our continent and declining social and health conditions of the people in general," he added.

"Carnage and horrors continued to resurface in parts of the continent — the violence and bloodshed and flagrant violations of human rights as evidenced in Liberia, Burundi and Somalia and the immense sufferings of millions of our brothers and sisters in the Great Lake region pains us," Mr. Salim said.

"It is therefore crucial that the conflict which has been raging in east Zaire be put to an end and the people of Zaire should embrace each other in the spirit of understanding, solidarity and national reconciliation," Mr. Salim said.

"We attach great importance to the unity, cohesion and territorial integrity of Zaire," he said.

He appealed to African states to promote democracy and human rights and "inculcate a culture of peace and tolerance in the African societies."

Mr. Salim urged OAU members to work toward the basic principles upon which the organisation was founded: "African states should not allow ourselves to be divided at a time when others are forging ahead in unity and strength."

"As we enter a new year, we should commit ourselves to work harder towards achieving peace and development in our continent. We should exert more determined efforts to address the scourge of conflict," he said.

S. Korean strikers threaten to paralyse country

SEOUL (R) — Militant South Korean unionists Sunday threatened to paralyse Seoul with mass rallies and halt traffic on all expressways unless the government revoked a controversial labour law which has sparked a wave of strikes.

"Overthrow the Kim Young-Sam government," chanted the protesters in red and blue headbands. Nearly 20,000 angry workers poured into a large square in Seoul's business district Sunday. The rally was called by the outlawed Ko-

rean confederation of trade unions.

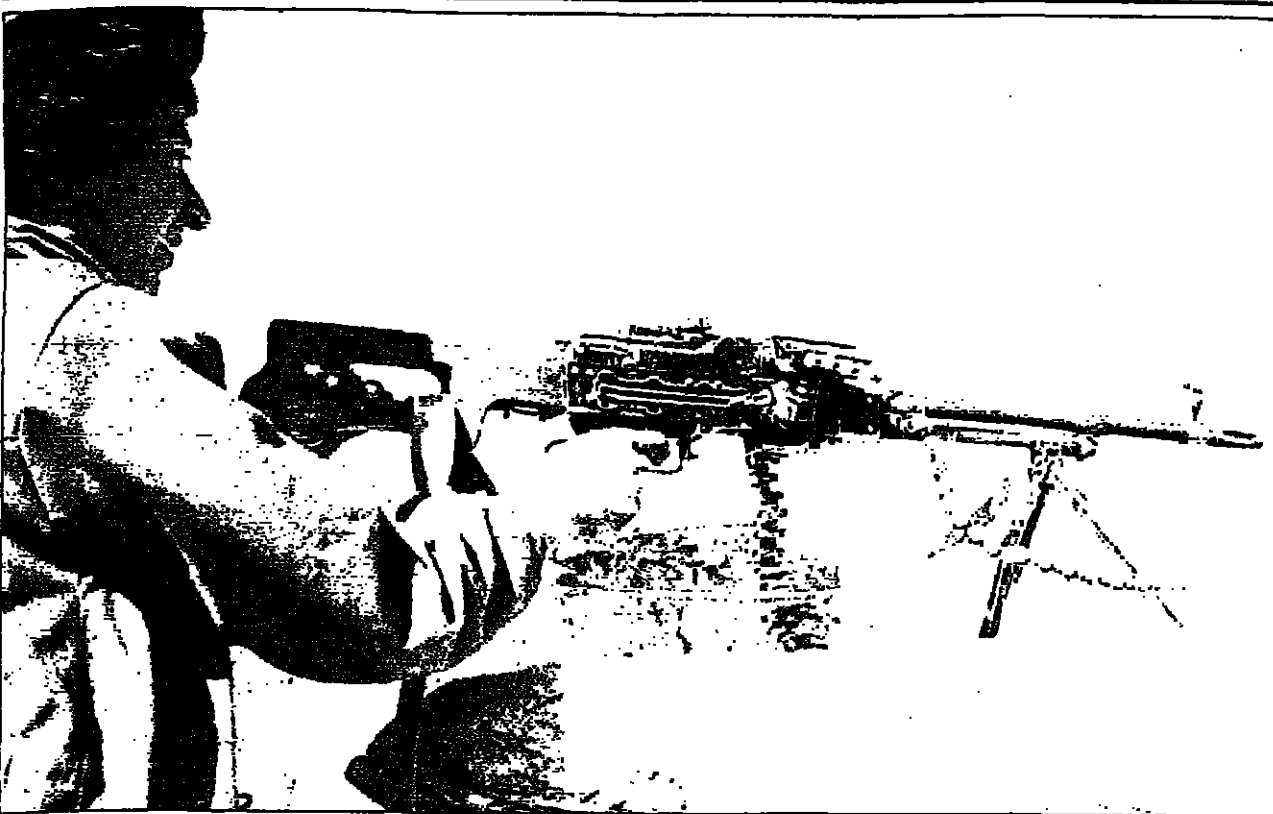
The leader, Kwon Young-Kil, threatened to clog the nation's main North-South highways by driving vehicles slowly in all lanes and blocking traffic. Many workers driving to the Seoul rally from southern provinces had protested in a similar fashion late Saturday.

His comments raised the temperature in a general strike that has paralysed industry and which turned violent for the first time Saturday.

Strikes began Thursday after the controversial law was rammed through parliament, and industrial chaos threatened to bring South Korea's economy to a grinding halt at least until the end of the year.

South Korea faces the prospect of closed hospitals and banks and sporadic subway services.

On Sunday Mr. Kwon also warned the 500,000-member confederation could call a full-scale rally in Seoul to paralyse the capital unless the government repealed the law.



The ammunition belt snakes wildly as a Taliban fighter fires his machinegun at rival faction troops on the frontlines near Qarabagh some 45 kilometres north of Kabul (AFP)

Anti-Taleban Afghan alliance hits back after losses

KABUL (AFP) — Warplanes from the anti-Taleban alliance have bombed the Afghan capital scoring direct hits in a series of raids after losing territory in renewed ground fighting with the Islamic militia.

Sources said a 500-kilogramme bomb hit north of Kabul International Airport terminal Saturday night, a 250-kilogramme bomb exploded near a hangar and another of a similar size just outside the airport.

An official source said only minor structural damage was caused and there were no casualties or damage to Taleban aircraft. The airport was operational Sunday.

A second raid targeted the presidential palace in central Kabul. The compound was hit by two bombs, but Taleban guards gave no further information.

A third night attack came near the Khana Palace, northwest of Kabul, which is a key supply route to the frontlines where bitter clashes erupted Friday.

The Muslim militia, who have controlled Kabul since

Sept. 27, launched a dawn offensive from their month-old frontlines and captured the district centre of Qarabagh, 45 kilometres north of Kabul.

By Saturday afternoon the Taleban were reported to have advanced several kilometres north of Qarabagh to a key road intersection.

The Taleban said they have stopped to consolidate their forces at the junction, to prepare for an offensive against the Parwan provincial capital of Charikar, about 10 kilometres further north, and against Bagram Air Base.

The Taleban offensive moved the militia closer to Bagram, but the Muslim leadership conceded that it was still controlled by the alliance fighting them.

Ex-government forces under Ahmad Shah Masood have joined the northern warlord Abdul Rashid Dostum and Shi'ite Muslim troops of Karim Khalili in a coalition against the Taleban.

Many alliance troops were killed in the fighting for Qarabagh though no official figure has been given.

The Taleban's governor of Kabul, Mullah Khairullah Khair Khwa, said some were killed as they tried to escape. "We ordered them to stop. Those who did were taken prisoner — those who didn't stop were shot," he told journalists.

Some of the dead had Afghan currency stuffed into their hands or mouths as a sign of contempt for their alleged mercenary status. All the corpses had their boots removed.

Scores of families fled the area on foot past blood-stained bodies lying by the side of the main road back into Kabul.

Special flat-bed trucks had been sent to collect a number of tanks captured by the Taleban. At least two Russian-made 122mm Howitzers were left behind by the fleeing alliance fighters.

"Trucks packed with opposition soldiers sent as reinforcements were surrounded. Many were killed and captured," reported Mullah Khairullah.

An AFP correspondent counted at least 18 dead on the seven to eight kilometres between Kalakan and Qarabagh.

The loss of Qarabagh and the advance against Bagram were a blow to the Dostum-Khalili-Masood alliance, which has declared a policy of maintaining strong defensive lines close to Kabul to harass the Taleban.

Gen. Masood was the military commander for President Burhanuddin Rabbani who was forced to flee Kabul by the Taleban, who now control around two-thirds of Afghanistan.

The jets which have attacked Kabul since the fighting were believed to have been Russian-made Sukhoi SU-22 bombers flown from Mr. Dostum's northern air bases at Mazar-i-Sharif and Shebarghan.

There were at least two day-time raids on Kabul Saturday.

The only civilian casualty reported from Saturday night's raids was a woman who suffered head wounds from Taliban anti-aircraft fire.

Pro-U.K. militants blamed for Northern Irish bomb

BELFAST (Agencies) — Outlawed pro-British militants were blamed Sunday for trying to kill a leading official of Sinn Fein, the political arm of their IRA guerrilla foes.

No organisation admitted the failed bomb attack in Londonderry, Northern Ireland's second city, Saturday, but local media reports quoted unidentified "informed sources" as saying it was the work of so-called loyalist extremists.

At the same time, Sinn Fein denied a British newspaper report that its leaders Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness were recently appointed to the Irish Republican Army's seven-person "Army Council" leadership.

A Sinn Fein spokesman said: "There is no basis for it whatsoever."

The Sunday Times report, which quoted unnamed British security and intelligence sources, said the IRA leadership would call an open-ended tactical ceasefire in February but would give the go-ahead for more anti-British violence in the meantime.

The Londonderry incident, in which a bomb was put under the car of the party's director of elections in the city's waterside area, fuelled fears of a new cycle of tit-for-tat violence by

rival groups locked in conflict over British rule.

In Belfast, police were questioning six people after raiding a house in an Irish nationalist stronghold in the west of the city and finding what they believe were parts for a bomb.

The arrests were made late Friday and security forces spent all-day Saturday searching the house in the Whiterock area.

"A planned search of the premises took place and as a result police uncovered components of a suspected explosive device," a police spokesman said.

Sources in Sinn Fein said it was warning supporters to be on their guard after the bomb incident in Londonderry.

"We have all been told to check our vehicles before we get into them, and check our doors as well, because they (loyalists) have been known to put trip-wires on doors," a Sinn Fein member told Reuters.

British army technical experts dismantled the device but police refused to speculate on who was responsible.

The incident came a week after a senior Irish Republican was wounded in Belfast when his booby trapped car exploded.

Loyalist Ulster Freedom Fighters were widely

blamed for that attack and BBC Radio reported Sunday that "informed sources are linking the same organisation to the (Londonderry) incident."

Political efforts to achieve a new peace have been bogged down by Irish Republican Army's ending of a 17-month truce and bitter wrangling between rival parties.

The IRA, fighting to end British rule, ended its 17-month truce in February with a wave of explosions in mainland Britain.

Tension rose in Northern Ireland when it detonated two car bombs killing a soldier and wounding 30 inside British army headquarters at Lisburn, south of Belfast, in October, its first hostile action in the province for two years.

The security climate worsened last weekend with the wounding of a policeman by IRA gunmen and the car bomb attack on the Belfast Republican, seen as a reprisal by loyalist hardliners.

Loyalist guerrillas, fiercely determined to live under British rule, have made no comment on the attack or what it means for a truce they have maintained for the past two years.

Parties close to them insist that the silence means that the loyalist truce is still official in operation but rival politicians say it is a silence of convenience.

Meanwhile, Mr. McGuinness said Sunday "the situation is clearly a rapidly deteriorating one. We have a very serious and grave situation," he said in an interview with Sky Television.

In the interview Mr. McGuinness said he believed the only way forward for the Northern Ireland peace process was for the "British government to call an immediate general election," implying that Sinn Fein now placed its hopes with a labour government.

"A lot of us have come to the conclusion that this British government under John Major neither has the will nor the courage to move decisively into peace negotiations and to face up to the Unionists and their intransigence," said Mr. McGuinness.

During the interview, Mr. McGuinness also denied a report in the Sunday Times which alleged that Mr. McGuinness and Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams were recently nominated to the IRA's ruling Army Council.

"I absolutely and categorically deny that. It is an absolute lie. I have never been in (the Army Council). I have never been in the IRA," he said.

Sri Lankan president meets Indian premier

NEW DELHI (AFP) — Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga, who is in India on a week-long private visit, called on Indian Prime Minister H. D. Deve Gowda Sunday for informal talks, the Press Trust of India said.

Indian officials described Mrs. Kumaratunga's meeting with the Indian premier as a "courtesy call."

Mr. Deve Gowda hosted a lunch for the Sri Lankan leader, which was also attended by Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar, his Indian counterpart, Inder Kumar Gujral and other top officials from the two countries.

"Deve Gowda and Kumaratunga are understood to have had informal discussions on various issues including Indo-Sri Lanka relations," the news agency added.

Officials refused to comment on speculation the two leaders discussed Sri Lanka's ethnic war, led by rebels of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), which has claimed more than 50,000 lives over 24 years.

Mrs. Kumaratunga, who arrived in India last Tuesday for a vacation in the northern town of Jodhpur with her daughters, is believed to have met Mr. Gujral Saturday night, Indian sources said.

An Indo-Sri Lanka Joint Commission, headed by Mr. Kadirgamar and Mr. Gujral, was scheduled to have met in October, but the meeting was postponed because the Indian external affairs minister fell ill.

Mrs. Kumaratunga's visit followed reports of an offer by the LTTE to hold peace talks with her government through unidentified mediators.

India, where Tamil rebels had carried out training, sent more than 50,000 troops to Sri Lanka to fight the rebels following a bilateral pact in 1987. The troops were subsequently ordered out of the country in March 1990.

In Sri Lanka, the Foreign Ministry denied Indian press reports that President Kumaratunga planned a meeting with a local Tamil leader who is now living in self-imposed exile in India.

Malaysia's Sabah fears disease outbreak after deadly storm

KOTA KINABALU, Malaysia (AFP) — Malaysia's eastern Sabah state was bracing Sunday for an outbreak of water-borne diseases after its water supply was damaged in a tropical storm that left 141 people dead and up to 200 missing.

Health Minister Chua Jui Meng placed six flood-hit districts in Sabah on cholera alert, while all medical and health authorities have been directed to mobilise teams to take preventive measures.

Water contamination following the flash floods also threatens outbreaks of typhoid and diarrhoea, Mr. Chua warned.

"Right now the water is not safe to drink and people must only consume boiled water," he said.

Sales of ice were banned with immediate effect, while local authorities began cleaning up the flood-hit districts. Emergency fresh water supplies were also being shipped to the affected areas.

Officials at the main search-and-rescue operations centre in this state capital said they had not yet

received any reports of cholera.

Meanwhile, 300 rescue workers resumed their search at dawn Sunday for victims buried in the debris left behind Thursday by tropical storm Greg, which pounded the west coast of Sabah.

The death toll climbed to 141 with the discovery of six more bodies Sunday, and about 200 were still unofficially reported missing in the country's worst natural disaster. Most of the victims were Indonesian immigrants.

"Some of the bodies could have been swept into the sea," an official said, referring to riverside settlements badly damaged during the storm and strong currents in the adjacent rivers.

A total of 127 bodies have been recovered from the remote interior of Sabah's Keningau district. The other 14 bodies were discovered in four other districts.

A total of 17,000 people from 3,825 homes in 226 villages on Sabah's west coast were affected by the storm. Three thousand victims are housed at 11 evacuation centres, an official said.

"No one has been found alive today. The search is going on," the official told AFP.

The timber town of Keningau, 130 kilometres southwest of Kota Kinabalu, bore the brunt of tropical storm Greg's fury.

Keningau also faces the highest risk of being struck by disease because it has no clean treated water.

Water supplies to Keningau and to the other six districts was cut off when strong river currents washed away several water mains and damaged pipes.

The official said that although floodwaters were subsiding, rescue workers were having difficulty transporting fuel, food and water to Keningau.

"The bridges and roads are down. This morning, we made a detour of 30 kilometres to reach Keningau. We also sent eight lorries laden with petrol," he said.

Night rescue operations in the battered town had been hampered by lack of fuel, he said.

Hopes fade for 28 seamen missing in South Atlantic

CAPE TOWN (R) — A search resumed Sunday for 28 seamen lost in a remote part of the South Atlantic after their ship sank while carrying sugar from Brazil to Iraq.

A Hercules C-130 plane was flying to the area for the third day to look for survivors or wreckage from the Jahan, which went down Friday about 680 miles west of Cape Town.

South African Air Force spokeswoman Marietta Hopley said hopes were fading that the crew would be found alive, even though

weather in the area was fine.

"Up till now no radio contact, beacon signals or flares have been received or seen by the Hercules search crew," she said in a statement.

The Maritime Rescue Co-ordination Centre in Australia picked up a distress call Thursday night saying the freighter was flooding and the crew were abandoning ship. The centre said the Jahan went down five hours later.

There was no word on what caused the sinking of

the 15,022 deadweight tonne Jahan, built in 1972, registered in Belize and operated by Seafar Shipping of Singapore.

The weather in the region, midway between the South African coast and the remote island of Tristan da Cunha, was reported to be fine at the time.

A spokesman for Seafar in Singapore said the Jahan, owned by Jahan Shipping of Panama, was on charter to a London company and carrying 14,000 tonnes of sugar from Brazil to Iraq.

India successfully tests surface-to-air missile

NEW DELHI (AFP) — Indian scientists Sunday successfully flight tested an indigenous built surface-to-air missile named "Trishul" (Trident), the Press Trust of India (PTI) reported.

Trishul has been dubbed by analysts as India's answer to the U.S.-made Patriot, which was effectively used to shoot down incoming Iraqi Scud missiles over Saudi Arabia during the Gulf War.

PTI said defence scientists described Sunday's test of the multi-role Trishul as a "command-guidance flight" and said the launch of the rocket from the test range in the eastern region of Balasore was flawless.

The missile, which will be used by the army, navy and air force, is driven by solid fuel and becomes operative at an altitude of 500 metres. It has a maximum range of nine kilometres.

The Indian version of "Scud busters" is designed

to carry a warhead of 15 kilograms, the news agency quoted defence scientists as saying in Balasore.

Trishul is one of five guided missiles locally designed and developed as part of India's ambitious programme to build an arsenal of rockets and missiles.

India has also built a medium-range ballistic missile, which has a range of 2,500 kilometres and can carry a one-tonne nuclear warhead.

Suu Kyi again allowed to leave her house

BANGKOK (AFP) — Burmese pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi was allowed to leave her house for the second time in three days Sunday, but opposition sources said restrictions on her movement had not been lifted.

The Nobel Peace laureate attended a wedding in central Rangoon and then visit the nearby house of her late father, Burmese independence hero, General Aung San.

However, blockades either side of her residential compound remained in place.

"It is not a sign of the relaxation of restrictions," said Tin Oo, co-vice chairman of her National League for Democracy (NLD), speaking by telephone from Rangoon. "She would not be allowed to go out to meet the public."

Aides at Ms. Suu Kyi's house informed security officials about where she was going and roads were cleared for her passage. But the NLD leader did not request official permission to leave her house, Mr. Tin Oo said.

Sources inside the house said that six or seven police blocked the gates of the house as she was about to leave until a senior official told them to make way.

Witnesses said that later Sunday over 300 supporters gathered at around one kilometre east of her house on University Avenue where the NLD leader has addressed the public in the past.

They dispersed after one hour when the NLD leader did not show up.

She has been confined to her house for most of this month, following some of the most defiant street protests since 1988, by students demonstrating for a union and the release of detainees.

The ruling military junta, known as the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) accused opposition groups including the NLD of stirring up the demonstrations, which the NLD denied.

Ms. Suu Kyi was allowed to make her first trip outside in three weeks to visit the shrine of her late mother Friday.

Senior figures from the

NLD, including-party President Aung Shwe and Co-Vice Chairmen Kyi Maung and Tin Oo and their wives accompanied Ms. Suu Kyi to the wedding Sunday morning.

Mr. Tin Oo said she was invited by the father of the groom, an NLD member elected to parliament in 1990 general elections which the NLD won but were overturned by SLORC.

Mrs. Suu Kyi returned to her residence in the early afternoon.

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Bomb at Tibet government office damages district

BEIJING (R) — A bomb exploded outside a government office in the Tibetan capital, Lhasa, and Chinese authorities Sunday described the blast that shattered windows for 100 metres as "an appalling act of terrorism."

The Christmas Day bomb, the largest so far set off by anti-Chinese activists in the restive Himalayan region of Tibet, resulted in no casualties but caused widespread damage, local officials said by telephone from Lhasa.

"It was a huge explosion that could be heard a long way off," said a government official, who refused to be identified.

"This was the biggest bomb blast by counterrevolutionary elements in Lhasa," a party official said. "None of the terrorists has been arrested, but one thing is certain — this was done by plotters of the Dalai (Lama) clique."

The bomb exploded on the doorstep of the Lhasa City Chengguan District Government Office in the early hours of Dec. 25, ripping apart the gateway to the buildings that house

the main city government offices, the government official said.

"Windows for at least 100 metres around suffered some degree of damage," he said. "But because the explosion was in the middle of the night, no one was wounded."

He declined to give further details.

"The bombing... was an organised, planned, and targeted counterrevolutionary bombing incident staged by the Dalai (Lama) clique," local radio said Friday quoting a circular issued by the regional Communist Party committee and government.

It was "a serious counterrevolutionary political incident and an appalling act of terrorism," the circular said according to the radio report monitored by the British Broadcasting Corp and made available Sunday.

The London-based Tibet Information Network (TIN) said five people were wounded, some seriously. They included two nightwatchmen at the office and shopkeepers living nearby.

A nearby branch of the Bank of China was also reported to have been damaged along with two hotels, TIN said.

"The act of terrorism staged by the Dalai (Lama) clique is opposed by the people of Lhasa city, as well as by people all over the world," the party broadcast said.

"It fully demonstrates that the Dalai clique has cast off its previously so-called peaceful disguise to openly oppose the people of Tibet and has reached a point when it puts up a last-ditch struggle," it said.

China regularly blames followers of Tibet's exiled god-king, the Dalai Lama, for anti-Chinese unrest that erupts sporadically in the strategic mountainous region that straddles the Himalayas and runs along China's sensitive border with India.

The Dalai Lama, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989 for this non-violent campaign to win autonomy for his homeland, says he wants self-government and freedom of worship in the deeply religious Buddhist region. He fled

China in 1959 after an abortive uprising against Beijing rule.

Speaking at a meeting of party officials in Lhasa Friday, the vice chairman of the autonomous regional government, Gyamco, called for a campaign of retaliation.

"We should wage a tit-for-tat struggle against the Dalai clique's sabotage," he said.

"We should, once again, stage another campaign across Tibet to thoroughly expose and criticise the Dalai clique, heighten our alertness and strengthen preventive measures so as to keep the situation stable," the radio quoted him as saying.

Several much smaller bombs have been set off in Lhasa over the last two years, including one in 1995 that caused slight damage to a plaque donated by Beijing and another last March outside the headquarters of the Tibet regional government.

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Editor-in-Chief:
GEORGE S. HAWATMEH

Editorial and advertising offices:
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Telephone: 684311, 699634
Telex: 21497 ALRAI JO

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Safety of hostages first

REGARDLESS OF the reasons the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA) in Peru is citing for holding over a hundred people hostage in the Japanese embassy in Lima, the act cannot but be condemned in the strongest terms. Taking people hostage is not the proper way for driving political messages or for correcting wrongs. As such, the dilemma of the hostages should end now by releasing all of them before the MRTA members and the Peruvian government can start negotiating their differences in peaceful and civilised manners.

The roots of the problem in this Latin American country is that force was used in settling the conflict between the government and the rebels. Dialogue was absent and the calm that had prevailed was certain to vanish the moment the balance of power allowed for that.

The Peruvian government and the MRTA should realise that nothing but dialogue will resolve their problems. The two sides should resort to democratic means to realise what they believe as their rights and attain progress for their country. Otherwise, Peru will find itself in an unending cycle of bloodshed from which the whole people and the whole country will suffer politically and economically.

Continued political violence will definitely lead to economic stagnation. That will only make a solution to the internal problems of Peru more difficult to find.

Only through the spread of pluralistic democracy can MRTA and all other interested factions working for their own separate agendas have a real opportunity to play the role they think they deserve in running the affairs of their country. Christmas has passed with little or no sign that the standoff is on its way to a peaceful resolution. Statesmanship from the leadership in Peru and restraint on the part of MRTA may still lead to a solution to a seemingly impossible situation.

For now, however, it is the responsibility of the MRTA to ensure the safety of the hostages. Nothing can justify the infliction of any harm on them. The MRTA has already committed a big mistake by starting the hostage crisis. It should end the situation with the minimal loss by releasing them. But until then, the MRTA should not commit a bigger crime by allowing any harm to reach the innocent people under its control.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

A WRITER for Al Ra'i Sunday criticised government plans to open a register for the unemployed Jordanians, saying that such a register can never be of any use and only requires an army of employees to maintain. Fahed Faneek said such a register would not be accurate at any given time since the majority of those who register, including housewives, would do it for no reason and no expected benefits and also because most of the job seekers eventually find work. Such a register would be a burden on the government and its civil servants and would mean more expenses, with no benefit at all, according to the writer who said that the government can by no means come up with the funds to run such an affair. The writer suggested instead that the government open a register for the needy people, who he estimated account for 20 per cent of the Jordanians, amounting to 145,000 families. The writer said that these needy people are known and already registered with the National Aid Fund. The writer said that the government should cancel the subsidy on bread, which is now offered to all Jordanians, and restrict the subsidy to the needy group, stressing that by so doing, the government would not be spending JD 70 million a year but a mere JD 14 million on subsidising bread for the poor who, he said, really deserve assistance.

IN THE view of a writer for Al Dustour, investors who spent huge funds on creating hotels in Wadi Musa and other parts of Jordan are now regretting their action due to the low occupancy rate which is due to a shrinking tourism industry in Jordan. Mohammad Daoud said it is true that the lowering of the number of tourists and the high fees and taxes imposed on the visitors are responsible for this situation, but the investors themselves are to blame for their plight since they built more hotels than the tourists need, overestimating the benefits of the peace treaty between Jordan and Israel which many of them had thought would bring in large number of tourist groups and earn the investors a fortune. The same can be said about the country's community colleges: many of them are being transformed into schools or are closing down altogether due to the economic situation and to lack of jobs to absorb the graduates. The same fate awaits the private universities, predicted the writer. He said overestimating the country's need for hotels and community colleges has caused major problems to the banks, which spent huge sums and gave big loans to investors, and to the insurance companies which have been involved in these projects and eventually reaped losses.

Economic Review

By Dr. Yusuf Mansur

Saying goodbye to last year and wishing for a 'productive' new one

IT IS finally that time of the year when all calendars are thrown away and we say good bye to last year. Economists, like most people, sit and ponder the events that struck them as the most important and the developments which happened during the year. Why do they do this? Maybe because economists are trained to assume that best solutions are possible and that best practices do exist. So we look back not to reminisce but to ponder what could have happened if some things had been different.

For example, last year there were 3,251 car accidents in Jordan, with 69 people dead and 1,692 injured. Bad driving habits, lack of sophisticated road signs and organisation and old or bad quality new cars — which are on the road for the simple reason that the average Jordanian is unable to buy a good new car — have all conspired to kill and maim the city dweller.

Car customs fees in Jordan rank among the highest in the world, especially when the per capita income is taken into consideration. This can be demonstrated by a numerical example. A typical economics professor at a research university in the U.S. makes approximately \$60,000 and a new Honda Accord costs about \$12,000. This very same person earns about \$12,000 in Jordan and would pay close to \$60,000 for the car. In other words, the same car in Jordan costs 25 times the one in the U.S., when measured in relative income. Maybe if car duties were lower, fewer people would die, the environment would fare better and we would spend less on car maintenance, spare parts and cheap cars. It might be worth the effort to conduct a study on the effects of lowering car duties on safety, the environment and treasury revenues. (Treasury revenue may increase if the demand for motor vehicles is very responsive to price changes, as I suspect is the case. If people were to respond to a 30 per cent decrease in the after tax price of a car with a 50 per cent increase in car purchases, the treasury would pocket 20 per cent more in revenues and Jordan as a whole would be better off: this is otherwise known in economics as a Pareto improvement).

Furthermore, last year, the economy grew at 5.3 per cent in real terms. This growth rate was lower than that of the previous year, which was 6.6 per cent. (In 1996, the growth rate of the whole ESCWA region was 4.3 per cent). Investment decreased slightly from the previous year and imports represented 4.6 per cent of the GDP, compared to 3.7 per cent in 1995.

Debt per capita was \$1,455, down from \$1,467 in 1995. Unemployment, according to some reports, decreased from 15 per cent to 13 per cent as foreign labour markets became open to Jordanians. (These numbers are doubtful and may vary depending on the source). Foreign grants amounted to JD 191.3 million, a sum that was not as high as one would wish and which is likely to decrease by 18 per cent in 1997.

The decrease in the growth rate was mainly due to regional factors, which are beyond Jordan's control. The election of Israeli Premier Benjamin Netanyahu a few months ago brought with it a significant level of apprehension; and as he began to fulfill his campaign promises, investment levels began to drop both in Israel and in Jordan.

In Israel, the level of unemployment started to rise as Netanyahu's economic policy underscored the sale of confiscated Arab lands as the only viable economic solution to lower inflation. (Several plots of land in the Golan Heights were sold last week to Jewish settlers to build 96 housing units). This policy, among others, aims at stirring

up people's feelings of hatred and war and did not help the already weary investors decide to commit their funds to long-term capital expenditures in the region and Jordan. Had Netanyahu not won the elections, a better regional investment climate is sure to have emerged.

On the positive side, domestic developments helped thwart some of the negative effects that were caused by Netanyahu's election. The EU-Jordan Free Trade Agreement underwent several negotiation rounds and signalled to the world Jordan's globalisation trend.

Two months ago, Jordan submitted its official papers for accession to the World Trade Organisation, a giant step towards benefiting from the most-favoured-nation principle and joining over 130 nations in this body that espouses free trade.

Additionally, several regional trade agreements were signed and trade with the West Bank and Gaza is, hopefully, to become less restricted than in the beginning of the year with the new door-to-door agreement. Also, several economic laws aimed at streamlining procedures and creating transparency were drafted with the intent of making Jordan a more investment friendly nation.

Tourism saw some new truly positive developments. The Ma in Baths Company, which sustained JD 300,000 losses last year, will rent the baths to a private sector concern and request that they be renovated. The cost of renovation is three million dinars. Additionally, the Tourism College is being turned over to the private sector for greater efficiency and effectiveness. Eco-tourism is starting to be in vogue in Jordan as people learn about the effect of tourism on the environment and the potential of tours to Jordanian landscapes. For example, the director of the Dana Reserve, one of Jordan's most magnificent nature reserves, mentioned that caravan trips on camel backs from Dana to Petra will be marketed worldwide next year. This is an exceptional idea that shows sensitivity to Western tourism demand. (Eco-tourism is already a booming industry in Israel).

However, tourism saw some setbacks because the tourism sector was not ready for the impact of peace on Jordan. It seems that whatever planning there was, was done with complete disregard to Israel as a major and dominant competitor in the area of tourism. Of course, the Israelis were very aggressive and managed to enhance their tours by including short, one-day excursions to Jordan's world renowned sights, such as Petra. At the same time, hotel occupancy rates dropped to under 10 per cent in Aqaba and Petra, with the latter's infrastructure not matching the boom in hotel construction. Also, in spite of the recommendations of an extensive Japanese study, the Ministry of Tourism made some by-laws that could help create monopolies and harm the growth of the industry. Cohesive and strategic planning could truly benefit this sector.

The banking industry made \$200 million in profits last year, due to the stability of the dinar and groundless rumours around it. Many banks benefited from the interest differentials between the dollar and the dinar and proceeded to convince their customers to convert their dinar-denominated deposits into dollars. The banks then paid under 5 per cent to depositors, which is the rate on the dollar, and charged more than 14 per cent on loans. The dinar withstood the skirmish, thanks to the strong resolve of the Central Bank. The effect of monetary stability on the economy was well worth the price.

Overall, Jordan had a good year which could have been better. Anyway, as economists would say: "Have a Productive, Happy New Year."

LETTERS

Free media is constructive

To the Editor:

IT NEVER ceases to amaze me how every day in the Jordanian media we see unrelenting praise for the country and its achievements. No one can deny that Jordan has made astonishing accomplishments. Cornered in a region of instability by Israel, Syria, Iraq and Saudi Arabia, torn by conflicting national and religious sentiments, and plagued by minimal natural resources, Jordan, under the judicious and benevolent leadership of His Majesty King Hussein, has defeated the odds. Not only has it survived and developed, it has also won widespread international praise.

In spite of these achievements, we must not overlook the immense challenges that lie ahead and the problems that beset us today. While national pride is important, fundamental change at a cultural and institutional level still has to take place. First and foremost is the role of the media and the press. Why not have a genuinely open media which reveals the real problems that are thwarting Jordan's economic and social progress?

There has to be a realisation that there is nothing wrong with criticism and freedom of expression. Why is there this rampant fear of exposing problems and shortcomings? Wasn't this the vehicle behind the progress in the United States and Europe? The media should not be used to cover up flaws but to expose them so that decision makers are guided to make productive change which will, in turn, generate stability, prosperity, equality and freedom.

Admittedly there has been increased openness in Jordanian newspapers. Nevertheless, censorship is still widely prevalent and it is evident that TV news broadcasts concentrate on illuminating the positive achievements while largely neglecting deficiencies.

Excessive praise, exemplified by the unduly patriotic tones used by the news anchors regularly, does not do the country any good. As true as it may sound, believing in this country means standing up and saying what is wrong and improving upon it. This is the only gateway to progress.

A simple walk down Abdoun today will reveal that there is something dangerously erroneous with society — the gap between rich and poor is absurd. This is only part of the dilemma. The economy is clearly facing grave difficulties. The unrest in Karak last August was a clear indicator that economic improvement has to take place. A truly free market will help, with a free media as its backbone.

The country is also suffering from divisions on the basis of national origin. How can there ever be a cohesive Jordan with a single identity if this is the case? Although every country in the world is plagued by some internal divisions on the footing of gender, origin, ethnicity, etc., the situation in Jordan is particularly worrisome. For example, the awarding of government positions should be on merit factors only. Society is

divided between Palestinians and Jordanians, and history has shown us, again and again, that division is a catalyst for problems. The only way to defeat division between one Jordanian and another, on national origin, in this country is to have total equality and openness.

Solutions to these problems can only materialise when we have an open media which criticises, not to provoke unrest, but to create understanding of problems and to force change. Under the wise leadership of His Majesty, we have come so far. It is important to note that the paving of the road has not ended and the challenge we face today is enormous. An opened-up media will be a crucial step in solving the dilemmas facing Jordan today.

Marwan Hanania,
Cornell University,
U.S.

Immortal soul of a scientist

To the Editor:

CARL SAGAN's soul shall eternally soar in the wilderness, crossing the darkness of the expanding universe and joining the comets and planets in their voyage, seeking the shore of his cosmic ocean, singing with the seagull its saddest song ever.

"I am a collection of water, calcium and organic molecules," said Carl Sagan in his book "Cosmos".

If there is any way to describe the death of a scientist, it is in his own words: "Those who wish to postpone or avoid death, can improve the world, reduce its perils, make children who will live after us, and create great works by which they will be remembered."

From the dazzling Broca's Brain, through the fascinating Dragons of Eden and the Brilliant Cosmos, to the interstellar record in Murmurs of Earth and the superb Contact, Sagan's works shall continue to inspire millions of future scientists, and his memory shall remain forever.

Ziad R. Haddad,
Amman 11192.

The Jordan Times welcomes letters and contributions from its readers on any subject they wish to tackle. Letters intended for publication, however, should contain the writer's full name and preferably address as well. Names can be withheld only upon request and under special circumstances. Letters are subject to editing. The newspaper is not responsible for the return of unused manuscripts.

Human Rights File

Are some Jordanians more equal than others?

By Waleed M. Sadi

ARTICLE 6(1) of the Jordanian Constitution states that "Jordanians shall be equal before the law. There shall be no discrimination between them as regards to their rights and duties even on grounds of race, language or religion."

This cardinal faith in the equality between citizens, though, was never tested in a court of law because courts in the country, including the highest courts of the lands, are precluded from interpreting Constitutional provisions.

The task of construing the national organic law was curiously, and may I add archaically, placed in the hands of a quasi-judicial organ called the Higher Council for the interpretation of the various articles of the Constitution. This Council, however, has never been seized with the issue of equality between Jordanians.

So we have a Constitution which can only be interpreted by a group of people, four appointed from the Senate and four from the Court of Cassation, as stipulated in Article 57 of the Constitution, who have never taken time to render a ruling on the issue, and not for lack of opportunities.

As a result, one of the most organic parts of the Constitution has yet to be put to the test when relevant legislation is being enacted, be it on the subject of elections, equal treatment of people or equality between men and women in the country.

The immediate result of this judicial inaction till this late hour is that we, in Jordan, do not exactly know how we are actually equal with other citizens in every sense of the word, even though the country prides itself with having made great strides in advancing pluralistic democracy.

To be sure, there is not, and there cannot be, absolute equality between citizens even under the most favourable conditions. It is one thing to prescribe in the law books that citizens are equal and quite another to accord them equal treatment.

Even in the most advanced democracies, the haves end up enjoying higher protections and receive differential treatment in all walks of life. The same goes for the better educated, of course. The O.J. Simpson trial is still fresh in our minds and shows how his money was able to bail him out of imminent conviction.

If even in the U.S., the land of the free and equality between all, there is one standard of justice for the poor and another for the rich, we may not expect much from the less democratically oriented countries of the world.

Here at home, we are no different from other peoples when it comes to equal treatment. Can any one of us deny that one's clan, tribe or family does not weigh heavily in the way one is treated, even before the law? The same goes for one's financial or political clout and/or connection with spheres of influence. This is what we may call "Sunnet Al Hayat"; we either accept it as an irredeemable fact of life or look at it as something that can still be worked on to limit its negative effects as much as possible.

Our constitutional call for equality between people, irrespective of their faith, race or language, should perhaps be reviewed, for how can we still say that Christians in our midst are treated equally when a Christian cannot be a Prime Minister and Cabinets may not have more than one or two Christians?

And vice versa, how can we say that we treat Muslim Jordanians equal to Christian Jordanians when in national elections Christians are accorded a quota which in effect accords Christian voters more voting power than Muslim voters?

The same goes for ethnic minorities when we assign them a quota system, be that at the level of the Senate, the Lower House of Parliament or in the formation of cabinets.

The immediate effect of this quota system is to give these minorities a differential treatment which, essentially, is contrary to the equality clause of the Constitution. When we limit the ethnic minorities' number in any governmental activity, we are in effect discriminating against them.

And while we are at this point, why are the Armenian and Assyrian minorities completely forgotten, as if they did not exist? I, personally, do not know of any Armenian or Assyrian, now or ever, in a very high post, in the cabinet or Parliament. It would certainly be wrong to place an Armenian, for example, in a high profile job because he or she is Armenian, but it would be equally wrong to deprive him or her of equal opportunities because they belong to a very small minority group.

When we come to discrimination on the basis of sex, the problem becomes that much more thorny because the Constitution is nearly silent on the issue of gender equality. The first thought that comes to mind is why Article 6(1) stipulates that Jordanians are equal irrespective of their race, language or religion but does not go further by stating that no discrimination can be allowed on the basis of sex.

Was it a benign omission or was it intended to suggest that discrimination on the basis of sex is allowed? Were the racial, language and religious criteria stated as mere examples and therefore not an exclusive or exhaustive list?

It so happens that whenever the country's report to various U.N. human rights bodies is considered, the first question that came up is why the Constitution did not treat clearly the gender issue.

There has always been a consensus among the various U.N. bodies examining the periodic Jordanian reports that the Jordanian Constitution should be amended with a view to adding the gender issue in Article 6(1). But if and when we do take that step, we must be prepared to amend all other relevant legislation in the country which contains elements of discrimination on the basis of sex.

Despite all the rhetoric to the contrary, I doubt that Jordan is ready now to take that necessary step because it would entail a comprehensive overhaul of most of the laws. Still, this an important area of existing discrimination between citizens that awaits consideration and redress.

My conclusion is that we desperately need a Constitutional court or, much simpler, accord the existing highest courts of the land the right to interpret the Constitution. Instead of waiting for the creation of yet another court system, why not do what other advanced countries do in this domain: for example, emulate the U.S. which allows the Supreme Court to pronounce itself on constitutional issues.

The Court of Cassation and the Supreme Court of Justice in Jordan are capable of rendering judgements on constitutional grounds. Through the intervention of the existing court system, the country may still have a window of opportunity to further reduce the vicissitudes of discrimination in our midst.

Promise of peace not kept in 1996

By Nicholas Doughty
Reuter

LONDON — The misery etched on the faces of refugees may be the most enduring image from a year that never kept the promise of peace with which it had begun.

Brutal conflicts raged in corners of the world where the major powers have little interest, from Afghanistan to Central Africa. Hopes for an enduring Middle East peace waned, Russia struggled on with its problems and China flexed its muscles to the alarm of its Asian neighbours.

World leaders agonised over when to intervene in conflicts and how to deal with persistent problems such as terrorism.

The United Nations, the focus of hopes for a new world order just five years ago, was badly undermined by a financial crisis and an unseemly row about who should lead the organisation.

New technology like the Internet and the growth of free trade promised more wealth and opportunity for some, even though more than one billion people — one fifth of the planet's population — live in poverty and almost as many are starving.

With the approach of a new millennium, a pervading sense of insecurity about jobs, security and the future cut deep in Europe and elsewhere. Human rights groups charged that basic dignity was being denied to people around the world.

There were, though, some bright spots.

Peace held in Bosnia, scene of Europe's worst conflict in half a century. An agreement to end the fighting in Chechnya was signed after rebels had

repeatedly humiliated Russian forces with daring attacks in Grozny and elsewhere.

Nuclear powers finally stopped atomic tests and signed a treaty promising to end them forever.

In Russia, it seemed that a communist could be back at the helm five years after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

But President Boris Yeltsin staged one of the great political comebacks by winning elections in July, after trailing communist challenger Gennady Zyuganov in the polls.

The effort of victory took its toll and Mr. Yeltsin then had to undergo heart surgery, his country still grappling with a mountain of economic and social problems.

In the world's only remaining superpower, there never seemed to be much of a choice. U.S. President Bill Clinton easily won a dull contest against Republican challenger Bob Dole and prepared to start his second term, appointing Madeleine Albright as the first woman to become U.S. Secretary of State.

But it was the turmoil in Central Africa which probably caught the political and moral dilemmas of a difficult year.

A complicated struggle in eastern Zaire brought together throngs of refugees from the tiny countries of Rwanda and Burundi, both the scene of ethnic slaughter on an epic scale, with Zairean forces and rebels.

As with so many conflicts in a confusing post-cold war world, there were no clear dividing lines, no convenient national frontiers to make this a conflict between states.

Fighting in eastern Zaire,

where hundreds of thousands of refugees had gathered, pushed aid agencies to the brink of despair in October as Central Africa headed for chaos.

As had happened before in Bosnia and elsewhere, television pictures beamed around the world caught the imagination and eventually pushed the politicians into action.

Canada volunteered in early November to head a multinational aid force for the region. Weeks of discussions followed and by the time the international community had decided to send a force of up to 10,000, the situation had changed completely.

Hundreds of thousands of refugees from Rwanda suddenly decided to go home. Some argued a force was still needed to bring aid to thousands of others, others disagreed.

Once again, the picture was one of confusion and of governments caught flat-footed by rapid change.

The misery of the displaced was not confined to Africa.

Thousands fled the fighting in Afghanistan, where Islamic Taliban rebels swept into the capital Kabul in September.

Refugees trying to return home in Bosnia were often prevented from doing so, leaving many to question whether there could be true peace and reconciliation in the country.

Although the NATO-led peace force kept the lid on any potential new conflict, Bosnia's first post-war elections in September simply confirmed existing power structures in the country. Most of the alleged war criminals remained at large.

There were, though, signs of change in neighbouring Serbia and Croatia. Croatia

ian President Franjo Tudjman, reported to be seriously ill, faced discontent with his autocratic rule and Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic faced mass street protests.

Peace hopes dashed

The year had started with hopes that two of the world's longest-running conflicts, in the Middle East and northern Ireland, could soon be laid to rest.

Those hopes lasted just a few weeks. In February, Arab suicide bombers killed 27 people in Israel and the Irish Republican Army (IRA) broke a 17-month ceasefire with bomb attacks in London that killed three people.

Victory in Israel's elections for right-winger Benjamin Netanyahu in May sent a shudder through much of the Arab World.

Since then, the Israeli prime minister has been accused of reneging on previous agreements with the Palestinians and of abandoning the previous government's principle of trading land for peace.

By September, the Middle East peace process was in tatters after more than 70 people died in Israeli-Palestinian clashes.

In the Gulf region, Iran and Iraq remained defiant — despite U.S. pressure on its European allies to isolate them.

Iraqi President Saddam Hussein gave decisive backing to one of two rival Kurdish groups in the north of his country. An angry Washington fired cruise missiles at Iraqi installations in September, but to little apparent effect.

By the end of the year, Iraq was allowed to export some oil for food and medicines under a tightly-controlled U.N. system.

There were signs of unrest elsewhere in the Gulf, in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. In June, a bomb at a U.S. military installation in Saudi Arabia killed 19 Americans.

World leaders called again for a crusade against terrorism and pledged to work more closely together on the issue.

Despite their resolve, a blast at the 100th Olympic games in Atlanta killed two people in July and four died in a Paris bomb that ripped through a train in December.

In Asia, the focus changed somewhat from the fast-growing economies of the region to difficult strategic questions.

China, already embroiled in territorial disputes with neighbours and preparing to take Hong Kong back from British rule next year, conducted war games and missile tests off arch-rival Taiwan in March as the island prepared for presidential elections.

The United States sent warships to the area and the world was reminded of China's growing, unpredictable power.

Tensions between India and Pakistan and on the Korean Peninsula simmered. In September, South Korea accused the communist north of sending a submarine full of commandos to cause havoc.

In Latin America, guerrillas, poverty and the fight against drugs grabbed the headlines despite the relative economic and political stability of the region over the last few years. Communist Cuba defied new U.S. efforts to isolate it further.

In Europe, some of the biggest questions about the continent's future remained unanswered.

Randa Habib's corner

Learning to forgive and forget

LET'S FACE it, no marriage is perfect. No association is perfect either. And if it is difficult to ensure a successful partnership between two people, imagine how impossible it must be to have harmony between "thirty something."

In such a case one has to expect fights, problems, tensions, reactions of pride and rebellion, the same way one witnesses in a family when the children think that, after all, they are big enough, mature enough, to speak their minds while one of their parents still insists on having the upper hand and reigning in all members of the family.

Our "over thirty" are not different from any other family. They have their share of fights, although they have not yet celebrated the first anniversary of their unholy matrimony.

The difference is that while our family problems remain behind closed doors, the "thirty something's" ups and downs are public knowledge, and, by God, they insist on making a big fuss about it.

Take the latest, but not unique, incident. One of them declared one day that he is really angry with the person who heads the team, that he is sorry for every day he worked with him and that he is going home for good.

We all wondered why. So I called him to try to understand the reason behind his decision. I found a determined man at the other end. He was hurt, he told me, because his boss had insulted him, and he cannot tolerate such behaviour. So, like in any marriage, he said, when one of the spouses realises that the other party is not, after all, the person of his or her dream, they separate, and that was exactly what he sought to do.

What can one say? The man had his arguments and they were logical.

So I assumed that soon we would hear the name of the person to replace him in the team. Instead, few hours later, we were told the good news about reconciliation: Everything is forgotten, and harmony is back within the "thirty something." Obviously they had buried the hatchet.

Isn't this amazing? I think that there is a good lesson to be taught here to all couples who face difficulties. Think twice before you insult each other, especially in public. Learn to forgive and forget. And remember what you were told in your childhood: It is human to make a mistake as long as you remember not only to apologise but never to repeat it.

Damascus Declaration hits Iran for deploying missiles

(Continued from page 1)

sures "that it judges appropriate or to use other means to defend itself against any aggression," it said, alluding to the possibility of non-Arab intervention.

The mutual defence agreement is based on the principles of joint Arab

defence adopted by the Arab League in 1950s soon after its creation.

Signed in 1991 after the Gulf war to facilitate economic and security cooperation between Arab members of the U.S.-led coalition which drove Iraqi troops from Kuwait, the Damascus Declaration

has never been implemented.

Iran, which is not a member of the group, has a territorial dispute with the UAE about the islands of Abu Musa, Greater Tunb and Lesser Tunb. Tehran is also accused by Bahrain of fomenting Shiite Muslim unrest within its borders.

Just before the opening of the meeting on Saturday, Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Musa called on Iran to stop "creating problems in the Gulf."

The Damascus Declaration countries affirmed the UAE's right to the sovereignty of the three islands and "reiterated their

demand to the Iranian government to bring its occupation to an end."

They also called on Tehran to stop building installations on the islands and urged the use of peaceful means, such as the International Court of Justice, to resolve the dispute.

Press association joins call against Israeli fair

(Continued from page 12)

Mr. Obaidat said his group has asked the government to cancel the event, but has not received a response.

The Israeli trade exhibition is the first to be held in Jordan after the Kingdom and the Jewish state signed a peace treaty in October 1994.

Opposition parties base their argument on their rejection of normalisation of relations with Israel and contend that the trade fair would only serve Israel's business interests of getting into the Arab market.

Business organisations argue that the time is not opportune for an Israeli trade fair in Jordan, given the stalled implementation

of Israeli-Palestinian agreements. They also say that a strong message should be sent to headline Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that he could not hope for economic benefits of the peace process while he continues to refuse to acknowledge and respect Palestinian rights. Opposition in Parliament, led by the Islamic

Action Front (IAF) party, has called on the government to cancel the Israeli exhibition.

The government asserts that trade fairs, whether Israeli or otherwise, are the affairs of the private sector and points out that the Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty provides for trade ties between the two countries. As such, officials say, the

government has left it to the private sector to do whatever it finds fit to develop trade with Israel.

The Ministry of Industry and Trade said early this month that it had issued neither a permit nor a refusal for the event, which, it added, was beyond its realm and jurisdiction anyway.

Jordan welcomes Israeli stand on King's proposal

(Continued from page 12)

The Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty signed in October 1994 recognises Jordan's "special status" in the Islamic holy sites in Jerusalem.

Faisal Hussein, Palestinian minister with responsibility for Jerusalem, accused Israel of misappropriating the real objective of the King's proposal to undermine the final status talks on the future of Jerusalem.

"The Israelis are trying to make this proposal a substi-

tute for the final phase of (Israeli-Palestinian) negotiations and are posing here and now preconditions of Jerusalem as the eternal and indivisible capital of the State of Israel," Mr. Hussein told Radio Monte Carlo.

King Hussein's proposal "particular arrangements in anticipation of the permanent solution" and constitutes, according to Mr. Hussein, "a response to violations by Israel, which must stop Judaisation measures" in the Holy City.

Direct contacts could bring end to Lima crisis closer

(Continued from page 1)

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). The elimination of the middleman could speed up talks for a peaceful resolution, analysts said.

The Japanese are the biggest group of non-Peruvians held by about 20 MRTA members who took over the residence during a party to celebrate Japanese Emperor Akihito's 63rd birthday. The rebels still hold 83 of nearly 500 guests first captured in last week's assault.

In other developments

on the Japan end of the siege, the foreign ministry advised Japanese not to travel to Lima and a senior official said there would be no change in Tokyo's aid plans for Peru because of the crisis.

A ministry statement said in the present circumstances the safety of visitors to Lima could not be guaranteed. On the aid front, a senior foreign ministry official told reporters Japan would maintain at present levels its assistance to Peru which is the biggest recipient in Latin America. "We will continue what

we are doing right now. We are not considering any alteration to our policy," the official said.

He rejected criticism by the rebels that Japanese aid to Peru was flawed because it did not help the people most in need and was solely for the benefit of Japanese companies.

"Speculation is rife that Japan's Peru aid policy was wrong, but I don't think that is the case," the official said. "What we are doing is intended to root out poverty, and I'm pretty sure Peruvian people understand this well."

Arafat reports hurdles remain in Hebron deal

(Continued from page 1)

the risks for both Jewish and Muslim worshippers," he said. Palestinians are insisting on a police presence at the Hebron shrine in light of the 1994 massacre of 30 Muslim worshippers by a fanatical Jewish settler.

Mr. Erakat said Saturday that Israeli troops will withdraw from most of Hebron

one week after an accord is signed.

"Israeli troops will withdraw to outside 80 per cent of the town of Hebron exactly one week after an accord on that issue has been signed with the Palestinian National Authority."

A Palestinian opposition faction based in Damascus said Sunday that the upcoming agreement on

Hebron is unfair and will turn the West Bank town into a powder keg. "This accord is unfair, divides the town and turns it into a powder keg," the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) said in a statement.

The DFLP said that the Ibrahim Mosque "will remain under occupation" and that "the Palestinian

police will not have the right to be present" at the site.

The DFLP called for the "Palestinian people in the occupied territories to reject the town's division and to demand that the settlers leave to defuse the settlement time bomb."

Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said meanwhile the world a deal on Israeli redeployment in Hebron did not mean Jews would leave the town.

"Anyone who tells you we are leaving Hebron is telling you a lie. We're there and we're there forever. The Jewish people are not leaving Hebron," Mr. Netanyahu told American students.

"We expect an agreement on Hebron to be signed within the next day or two," David Bar Ilan, Mr. Netanyahu's media adviser, said on Saturday.



Prime Minister Abdul Karim Kabariti, accompanied by senior officials, on Sunday tours the southern town of Tafleh (Petra photo)

Kabariti assures Tafleh residents

(Continued from page 1)

roads, speed up work on the construction of an industrial city and solve the chronic issue of water supplies

for the region.

At the outset of the visit, the prime minister inaugurated a vocational training centre. Mr. Kabariti, who was accompanied by minis-

ters of supply, youth, social development and local officials, also inspected work on the highway linking Tafleh with the southern Jordan Valley region.

Syria ready to resume talks with Israel

(Continued from page 1)

day, said it is not clear whether the Hebron negotiations represent an Israeli commitment to peace.

Mr. Sharaa said there are "two theories" about the negotiations on Israeli troop redeployment from Hebron, the last Palestinian town on the West Bank under Israeli occupation and a key to unblocking the Middle East peace talks.

"The first is that Israel aims at prolonging the negotiations and pushing them into mazes ... But we as Arabs will not be fooled by these attempts," Mr. Sharaa said.

"The second theory is that Israel after concluding the Hebron agreement will enter in peace negotiations with Syria and Lebanon, and we of course will welcome this," the minister said.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has acknowledged that his predecessors tacitly agreed to give back the Golan in exchange for a peace agreement. But he said there is no signed agreement to bind him, and the Golan must remain under Israeli control for its security.

Mr. Sharaa said the peace process "suffers a kind of collapse, seems hardly to have existed for nearly a year, and naturally Israel is responsible for this."

After the Damascus Declaration countries' opening five-hour session Saturday, Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Musa said the meeting was "a serious attempt to activate joint Arab efforts."

Mr. Sharaa said the Damascus Declaration countries were "not optimistic" about the fate of the Arab-

Israeli peace process.

"We discussed the peace process. Our general view in the meeting without exception is that we are not optimistic about the fate of the peace process," Mr. Sharaa told Reuters late Saturday.

Mr. Musa said the ministers discussed Middle East peace.

"We talked about the peace process. Farouk Al Sharaa explained the position of Syria on the peace process, and the lack of movement on this track, and the current stage of negotiations with the Hebron subject," he told reporters.

Asked if the Omanis and Qataris were freezing normalisation with Israel, Mr. Musa said, "yes, they told us that."

Dabbas, Awad lead Jordanian team for talks with Iraqi officials

By P.V. Vivekanand
Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources Hashem Dabbas and Minister of Finance Marwan Awad left for Baghdad on Sunday for discussions with Iraqi officials on trade and economic cooperation, officials said.

The key objectives of the visit are the renewal of the annual agreement on Iraqi oil supplies to Jordan and a close review of Jordanian exports to Iraq, according to the officials.

High on the agenda, the officials said, was also issues related to the outstanding Iraqi debts to the Kingdom, estimated at \$1.2 billion.

The two ministers, who are accompanied by aides, represent the highest-ranking Jordanian team to visit Iraq in more than one year.

Dr. Dabbas and Mr. Awad will also set the ground for a meeting on Jan. 6 of the Joint Jordanian-Iraqi Economic Committee that would formalise the annual trade protocol between the two countries.

Trade ministers of the two countries chair that committee.

Citing the outstanding Iraqi debts, Jordan this year reduced the volume of the trade protocol to \$220 million from \$400 million in 1995.

Officials have said that the amount was unlikely to be changed for fiscal 1997. However, Jordan continues to receive 50,000 barrels per day (bpd) of Iraqi crude and 20,000 bpd of fuel oil under discounted prices.

Jordan exports food and medicine to Iraq in settlement of the oil bill, but the Kingdom said early this year that it was unable to pay the foreign currency for reexports to Iraq and hence the reduction in the protocol.

The protocol covers only items manufactured in Jordan and does not include reexports and processed food and related items using imported raw material as was the case in 1995.

Jordanian businessmen maintain close links with the Iraqi government and private sector. Their business with Iraq is largely outside the protocol.

Khalid Abu Hassan, president of the Amman Chamber of Industry, said last week that Jordanian

firms had secured deals worth \$110 million during several visits to Baghdad in the last two months.

Further export orders, mostly for pharmaceuticals, are expected to be finalised soon.

The deals are also outside the oil-for-food agreement signed by Iraq with the United Nations under which Baghdad has started exporting oil for the first time since August 1990 when the U.N. imposed sweeping sanctions against that country following its invasion of Kuwait.

The U.N. has exempted the Iraqi oil exports to Jordan from the sanctions.

Jordanian businesses have to compete internationally for export orders to Iraq under the oil-for-food deal because tenders would be floated for Iraqi purchases under the deal and a U.N. committee — made up of the U.S., France, Russia and Britain — will award the orders based on prices and quality.

Furthermore, orders will be placed directly with the countries of origin of the concerned products and all middlemen and reexporters are eliminated from the arrangement.

Agriculture blocks EU-Egyptian agreement

CAIRO (R) — Egypt and the European Union (EU) failed to agree on agricultural quotas in the latest round of talks on a partnership agreement providing for free trade in services and manufactured goods, the Egyptian negotiator has said.

Ambassador Gamal Bayyouni told Reuters in an interview that the European Union did, however, agree to increase again the quotas it is offering for Egyptian food exports to Europe — the main bone of contention in the talks.

Mr. Bayyouni met Enrico Cioffi, director of external relations at the European Commission, in Brussels earlier this month for informal negotiations on the agreement.

The Europeans had already increased by about 100 per cent the quotas on offer for the main categories of Egyptian agricultural exports — potatoes, citrus fruit and cut flowers — but Mr. Bayyouni said they knew that this would not be enough.

"They knew this was not a real offer. I could give no reaction other than a big no. Double a zero is still zero... They told me they didn't expect me to accept," he said.

"They promised to ameliorate the situation (raise the quotas)... then we can fix a date (to meet again)

for some time in the second half of January," he added.

Mr. Bayyouni repeated Egypt's view that the main obstacle to an agreement is the European Union's common agricultural policy (CAP), which subsidises European farmers to produce food at prices higher than those at which Europe could buy food abroad.

"We need a political decision on the European side because I am not going to commit suicide on my side by adopting fraction figures like those (the latest quota offers)," he said.

He said the draft agree-

ment would cost Egypt 14 billion pounds (\$4.1 billion) in lost customs revenue from European industrial imports over a 12-year transitional period and losses at the end of the period would be 3.5 billion pounds a year.

"While all we are asking for is a few million dollars in agriculture," he added.

Ideally Egypt would like to export agricultural produce worth \$1.5 billion a year to Europe but Mr. Bayyouni said the country would accept a deal that offered less as long as it served Egyptian interests.

He said he saw little

sign that Europe was willing to carry out radical reforms to the CAP but he did see gradual progress in the long negotiations.

"The European negotiator is moving but he is hesitant to say what he has in his pocket... I think we are gaining, one day after another," he said. "But now I don't have anything in my hands to offer to the political level," he added.

One of Egypt's trump cards, he added, was that Europe cannot expect good cooperation with the countries on the southern bank of the Mediterranean unless it opens its markets to them.

HOROSCOPE FORECAST FOR MONDAY, DECEMBER 30, 1996

By Thomas S. Pierson,
Astrologer, Carroll
Righter Foundation

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) You want to get off to new places today, however remain steadfast and everything will be well. Show that you are devoted at home with your loved ones and able to make your residence a peaceful place to live.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) It's important that you keep your promises you have made to close friends and fellow associates. Try not to disagree with your attachment or there could be a difference of opinion which could cause a difficult situation.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) You think that an outside fellow associate is trying to force you to do something you do not like, so be careful. Later this evening you can meet with close friends for a wonderful time together and relax for the days ahead.

MOON CHILDREN: (June 22 to July 21) Make a concrete plan for career activities ahead of you and you can handle it most efficiently. Later this evening you can meet with a knowledgeable person and gain the insight which you desire to become successful.

LEO: (July 22 to August 21) You want to have fun today, however it would be best to postpone being with your friends until a better time. Later this evening you can visit with close friends for a good time and relax for you have a busy schedule ahead.

VIRGO: (August 22 to September 22) Get your time scheduled wisely today so that you can handle the business and home affairs nicely and thereby make your life more prosperous. Later this evening will be good to go out on the town with close friends.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 22) This is a day today to be most careful in motion or you could suffer serious accident which could be costly. Later this evening you can make contact with fellow associates and devise a plan of action to gain the success you wish.

SCORPIO: (October 23 to November 21) Your judgment is not very good at this time, so do not make decisions which are important or these could be a difference of opinion. You may regret any new projects which need the assistance of someone who has another solution.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) You are discontented and you could make some radical moves today which you may later regret. Later this evening will be good for discussions concerning any solutions to difficult situation which is present.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 20) The week opens with a problematical affair rising which seems hard to solve. Wait later this evening before tackling it so that you can gain recognition of a higher-up which will make your life more prosperous in the days ahead.

AQUARIUS: (January 21 to February 19) If disagreements arise between a close friend and others, do not get involved and remain neutral otherwise you could get into a difficult situation which can detract from your successful method of operation.

PISCES: (February 20 to March 20) Carry through with your agreements with a loved one and thereby make your life successful. Later this evening will make a good time to complete a new project, so that you have fun with your loved ones, so become successful.

Birthingstone of December:
Turquoise — Zircon.

Syrian investment law lures projects valued at \$8.6 billion

DAMASCUS (R) — A special Syrian law encouraging local and foreign private investment has lured \$8.6 billion worth of projects in the last five years, a senior official has said.

Mohammad Saragbi, director of the Investment Bureau, told Reuters in an interview 1,457 projects worth 363.3 billion Syrian pounds (\$8.6 billion) had been approved since May 1991 when the law was implemented.

He said the projects, in the industrial, agricultural and transport sectors, would provide over 100,000 jobs.

More than 265 billion pounds of the projects' investments were in hard currency. The value of imports of equip-

ment and other tools and materials needed for the projects would total about 208 billion pounds, he said.

Syria, keen to attract local businessmen, Syrian expatriates, Arabs and foreigners, formed the Investment Bureau to group the ministers of economy and foreign trade, finance, industry, agriculture, oil and tourism under the chairmanship of the prime minister.

Mr. Saragbi said the projects approved until the end of last month included 631 industrial projects worth 256 billion pounds that would provide 56,727 jobs.

Projects in land and sea transport and car rentals totalled 774 with a value of

\$4.9 billion pounds, providing 40,737 jobs.

Agriculture came third with 50 projects worth 21.8 billion pounds, providing 3,657 jobs. Mr. Saragbi said that figure was low because many other projects were listed under another agricultural investment law.

Two other projects were approved for the generation of electricity and mining, Mr. Saragbi said.

The biggest project approved was a cement company which is planning to produce three million tonnes of black cement per year and would have a capital of \$450 million.

The project, still under construction, is jointly owned by Syrian and Arab Gulf busi-

nessmen.

Other big projects included a \$100 million textile spinning mill with a capacity of 15,000 tonnes, and a \$100 million sugar plant capable of processing 60,000 tonnes a year.

A major project under discussion is a plan by a group of Europeans and Syrian expatriates to build a \$800 million oil refinery in cooperation with the Syrian ministry of oil, to process six million tonnes of oil per year, Mr. Saragbi said.

Syria which produces over 600,000 barrels of crude oil per day (bpd) has two refineries with a combined capacity of 208,000 bpd.

Investment law number 10, issued in May 1991, gives investors tax-free income for five to nine years, allows them to import all their needs without customs duties, and imposes no fees or any taxes when they buy land or other property for their projects.

REUTERS REUTERS

The Business of Information

Major Currencies & Cross Rates									
Currency	USD	DEM	GBP	CHF	JPY	CAD	ITL	NFL	FRF
US Dollar	1.5535	0.8908	1.3470	115.45	1.3690	1629.00	1.7452	5.2425	
DE Mark	0.6437	1.0000	0.8669	74.32	0.8810	983.91	1.1233	3.3748	
GB Sterling	1.6925	2.6305	1.0000	2.2783	194.94	2.3170	2587.83	2.9538	8.8729
CH Franc	0.7424	115.29	0.4382	1.0000	85.71	1.0160	1134.69	129.31	3.8905
JP Yen	0.0087	1.3444	0.5110	1.1657	1.0000	1.1848	13.23	151.03	4.5370
CA Dollar	0.7305	1.1408	0.4394	0.9793	1.118	1.0000	1121.87	128.07	3.8558
IT Lira	0.0007	1.0154	0.3859	0.0880	1326.08	0.8948	1.0000	11.41	3.4265
NL Guilder	0.5730	89.99	0.3353	77.17	86.12	0.7842	878.87	1.0000	3.0051
FR Franc	0.1907	0.2962	0.1128	25.6792	22.00	0.2610	33.27	33.2700	1.0000

Energy									
Oil	Last	Previous							
Brent	24.15	24.25							
WTI	25.15	25.05							
Bony	24.15	24.25							
Dubai	21.45	21.40							
UL Gas	214.00	213.00							

Mid-East Currencies									
Currency	USD	DEM	GBP	CHF	JPY				
SA Riyal	0.2686	0.4144	0.15754	0.3593	30.81				
AE Dirham	0.2725	0.42344	0.16089	0.36716	31.4552				
KW Dinar	3.3353	5.18403	1.97083	4.49438	385.356				
BH Dinar	0.3770	4.12201	1.55715	3.57398	306.466				
CY Pound	2.1232	3.2984	1.2537	2.86	245.123				

Metal Prices									
Metal	Bid	Offer							
Gold (oz)	369.25	369.75							
Silver (oz)	4.89	4.91							
Platinum (oz)	370	371							
CU (3 Months)	1545	1548							
CU (6 Months)	2125	2130							
Zinc (3 Months)	1075	1078							
Lead (3 Months)	712	716							
NI (3 Months)	6470	6500							

Currency Deposit Rates (Bid)									
Cncy	Month	3	6	9	1				
USD	5.56	5.50	5.50	5.59	5.88				
GBP	6.18	6.25	6.44	6.82	6.78				
JPY	0.31	0.31	0.38	0.33	0.38				
DEM	2.87	2.87	2.94	2.94	3.00				
FRF	3.34	3.28	3.40	3.28	3.46				
CHF	1.87	1.81	1.88	1.78	1.81				
ITL	7.43	7.20	6.86	6.58	6.50				

Main Equity Indices									
Bourse	Index	Value	Chng	% Chng	High	Low	Pr Ch		
New York	DOW JONES	6560.91	14.23	0.22	6576.28	6557.46	6546.88		
New York	S&P 500	758.75	0.97	0.13	758.75	754.82	755.82		
London	FT-SE 100	4091	-1.5	-0.04	4102.9	4088.6	4092.5		
Tokyo	NIKKEI 225	19369.04	-77.46	-0.4	19423.6	19161.1	19291.6		
Paris	CAC 40	2306.95	3.2	0.14	2312.18	2291.37	2303.75		
Frankfurt	DAX	2852.88	7.31	0.26	2857.31	2852.73	2845.57		

Energy									
Commodity	Last	Delivery							
Coffee (c/lb)	117.83	Spot							
Cocoa (c/lb)	1370	Spot							
Sugar (c/lb)	311.9	Spot							
Wheat (c/lb)	21.46	Spot							
Tea (c/lb)	125	Spot							
Barley (c/lb)	2.18	Spot							
Rice (c/lb)	470	Spot							

JOD Cross Rates									
Currency	Buy	Sell							
US Dollar	0.708	0.710							
GB Sterling	1.1973	1.2033							
DE Mark	0.4553	0.4576							
CH Franc	0.625	0.6278							
FR Franc	0.1349	0.1356							
JP Yen	0.6123	0.6154							

Gulf Air says it is moving into the black

MANAMA (AFP) — Gulf Air, owned by four Arab Gulf governments, last week said it has started making a profit after several years in the red.

Gulf Air chairman and chief executive Ahmad bin Saif Al Nahyane said the company made a profit of 5.1 million Bahraini dinars (\$13.5 million) during the third quarter of this year, compared to the loss of 4.8 million dinars (\$12.7 million) during the same period of 1995.

"We are approaching the end of the tunnel, but let us not be blinded by this ray of light, we must continue to make further adjustments to sustain the momentum," he said in a statement reported by the Gulf daily.

News of Bahrain. He said the company succeeded in reducing its operating costs by 14 per cent, despite this year's increase in fuel prices, and that Gulf Air has generated "good revenue" from the leasing of six aircraft and the sale of a seventh.

"Earlier fears of Gulf Air being on the brink of collapse have now been replaced by renewed faith in our airline," he said.

Gulf Air is owned, in equal shares, by the governments of Abu Dhabi, Bahrain, Oman and Qatar.

Unconfirmed press reports this year said Abu Dhabi and Bahrain offered to bail out the company on condition they buy Qatar's and Oman's stakes.

New Palestinian bank to open in Ramallah

DUBAI (AFP) — A wealthy Gulf businessman has announced the opening in January of a new bank in the West Bank town of Ramallah, the sixteenth in the Palestinian territories.

Issam Abdul Salem Abu Issa, a Qatari of Palestinian origin, said the Palestinian International Bank (PIB) already has more than 1,132 Arab and foreign shareholders including businessmen from Qatar and the United Arab Emirates.

Mr. Issa told a news conference in Dubai that the bank's capital was \$20 million but he hoped to raise it to \$40 million, although he gave no timeframe.

The bank will open its doors for business in the first week of January and be officially inaugurated in April by Palestinian National Authority President Yasser Arafat, said Mr. Issa, chairman of the bank board.

Offices are also expected to be opened in Gaza City and Nablus.

"PIB's priority will be investment in commercial and industrial fields" in the autonomous territories," said Mr. Issa, adding that an investment fund would be set up soon in those sectors.

Arafat's PLO has estimated that \$11 billion would be needed between now and 2000 for infrastructure projects and to help rebuild the economy.

Fifteen banks, including nine foreign institutions, operate in the autonomous territories, with assets of around \$1.6 billion.

Three Arab states to link their bourses

MUSCAT (AFP) — Three Arab Gulf states have signed an agreement to link their stock markets to encourage investment as part of their long-standing economic pact, the official media reported.

The stock markets of Bahrain, Kuwait and Oman signed the deal in Muscat after the establishment of a link between the Manama and Muscat exchanges.

The directors of the three exchanges signed the agreement after intensive negotiations through the year on cross-listing banks and companies on their trading floors, the official Omani News Agency said.

Fowzi Bahzad of Bahrain said last week the link would be one of the most important stock agreements in the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

"It will encourage cross-listing of companies in the three markets and increase investment and the flow of capital between our countries. This will boost economic cooperation among the GCC," he said.

Oman and Bahrain have already linked their floors and several companies from the two countries have been listed in both exchanges.

Muscat exchange director Mahmud Al Jarwani said last year he hoped such cross-listing deals would pave the way for linking all GCC exchanges in line with their 1982 economic pact which calls for a common market.

Two other GCC members — Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) — do not have official exchanges but are planning to open trading floors.

Share-dealing in Saudi Arabia, by far the biggest GCC member, is conducted through the most sophisticated bank network in the Middle East, as the country was forced to shut its bourse shortly after it was opened eight years ago because of opposition by the influential Muslim religious community.

Official figures showed Kuwait had 56 trading companies, with a market capitalisation of around \$15 billion at the end of September.

Bahrain had 37 trading firms, with market capitalisation of \$4.78 billion, while Oman had 95 such firms, with market capitalisation of \$2.55 billion.

Daily Beat

A review of news from the Arabic press

Amended law lessens penalties for bounced cheques

** A LAW amending the penalties for issuing cheques that cannot be cashed for insufficiency of funds in one's account has taken effect after being endorsed by a Royal Decree and published in the official gazette. The amended law opens the way to avoid imprisonment if the payment is made by the defendant and the dispute was resolved amicably.

According to the amendment, the judges of the magistrate courts will be responsible to look into the crimes of "returned cheques" for lack of funds in the accounts. Under the previous legislation, the examination of the case was the responsibility of the judges of the courts of first instance.

The modified law reduced the jail term from a maximum of three years or a minimum of four months to a maximum of two years or a minimum of one year. However, a court can consider leniency justifications and reduce the jail term to three months. The courts were not allowed to substitute the jail sentence by a fine.

Notwithstanding the substitute restriction, the law obliged the courts to only impose a fine of five per cent of the cheque's amount or a minimum of JD100, if the plaintiff drops personal charges or if he pays the full amount of the cheque.

This law will be retroactive.

By enacting the amendment, the legislative authority has opened the door for many people who were sentenced to imprisonment in absentia to return home and conclude settlements with their creditors to avoid the jail term by paying the five per cent fine. Moreover, the law will lessen the number of cases at courts and allow debtors to pay part of their dues because under the previous law, debtors could care less as they had to serve a prison term even if they manage to pay their dues to the creditors (Al Dustour).

Israeli bus company makes last Tel Aviv-Cairo run

TEL AVIV (AFP) — The private Israeli bus company Egged made its last run from Tel Aviv to Cairo on Sunday, having decided to drop the route because it is unprofitable, a spokesman for the cooperative said.

"After the signing of the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty in 1979, the line operated every day except the Sabbath, the weekly day of rest. Because of a lack of passengers, the link became weekly," the spokesman told AFP.

"Egged has finally decided to give up this route, which is unprofitable and has fewer than 10 passengers on average every Sunday," he indicated.

Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai had asked Transport and Energy Minister Yitzhak Levy "to do everything possible to guarantee the bus link between Tel Aviv and the Egyptian capital."

"This line is the expression of peaceful relations between Israel and Egypt. It's an important symbol which must be preserved and even strengthened, be it at the price of state subsidies to Egged because of a temporary lack of passengers," he said in a statement.

The transport and energy ministry said that it would do its utmost to reestablish bus service between Tel Aviv and Cairo within a month.

Israeli-Egyptian relations have been cooler since the right-wing Likud Party coalition came to power in Israel in June and slammed the brakes on the peace process.

Zenith to cut staff by 25 %

GLENVIEW, Illinois (AFP) — The U.S. electronics firm Zenith, facing losses of \$109 million, has said it would cut its workforce by 25 per cent in a major restructuring drive.

A company statement here said the move would require a fourth-quarter charge of about \$25 million.

Approximately 375 salaried positions are to be eliminated, reducing the number of U.S. salaried workers to fewer than 1,500.

In addition, 800 hourly positions will be abolished, largely through attrition.

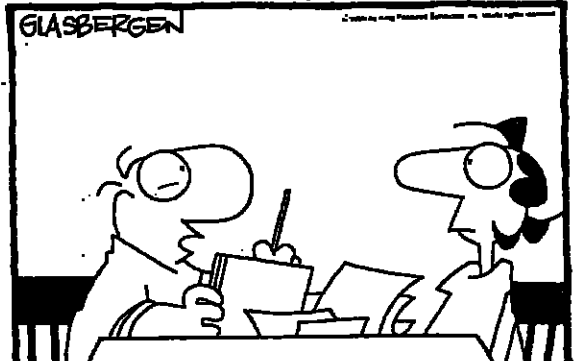
With all the cuts in place, total company workforce would be around 2,000, according to Zenith.

"Our fixed costs are simply too high for a company with sales at our levels and reporting such huge losses," company president Peter Willmott said in a letter to employees.

He called these actions "a necessary step in Zenith's turnaround process."

The employment reductions are expected to reduce expenses by approximately \$20 million in 1997.

THE BETTER HALF. By Glasbergen



"You spend 50% more on cosmetics since you found out that spy satellites photograph people from space."

THAT SCRAMBLED WORD GAME by Henri Arnold and Mike Argiron

JUMBLE

Unscramble these four Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

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SACULE

Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

Print answer here: _____

(Answers tomorrow)

Saturday's Jumbles: TOKEN DOWDY NATURE COHORT

Answer: Why he bought a trumpet — TO TOOT HIS OWN HORN

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Jordan scores 45 against stingy Cavs

CHICAGO (R) — Michael Jordan scored 45 points against the NBA's stingiest defence and the Chicago Bulls held on for their ninth victory in 10 games, 102-97 over the Cleveland Cavaliers Saturday.

Jordan was 13-of-25 from the field and 19-of-20 from the line. He scored 27 points in the first half as Chicago opened a 60-47 lead against Cleveland, which came in allowing a league-low 82.8 points per game.

"Tonight was my night to get out of the box quickly," Jordan said. "I was able to get my act together and pull everyone along with me."

He drew three fouls in the first six minutes on Cavaliers guard Bobby Phillips, one of the best defenders in the league, before doing most of his damage against second-year guard Bob Sura. Phillips fouled out with 1:50 to go, scoring 17 points.

"Part of our game plan was to get Phillips in trouble early," said Jordan. "We were able to do that and took them out of some of the things they do offensively."

The Cavs, who have lost five straight to the Bulls, gave up more than 100 points for just the third time this season.

In Dallas, Derek Harper scored a season-high 24 points and Jim Jackson added 18 as the Mavericks blew an 18-point halftime lead but pulled out a 95-90

victory over the Seattle SuperSonics.

"Derek came out with outstanding energy. His first half was probably as well as I've seen anyone play all year," said Dallas coach Jim Cleamons. "I think it was a total team effort from top to bottom this evening. I hope we can build on this one."

Dallas, which had lost three straight, avenged a 93-79 loss at Seattle six days earlier.

Gary Payton totaled 28 points, a season-high 10 rebounds and eight assists for Seattle, which had its five-game winning streak halted. Shawn Kemp added 24 points and seven boards.

Dallas was playing for the first time since trading Jason Kidd to Phoenix Thursday as part of a six-player deal.

In Vancouver, Danny Manning scored 19 points, including four free throws in the final 16 seconds, as the Phoenix Suns blew a 15-point lead and lost Kidd to an injury but rallied for a 103-98 victory over the Grizzlies.

Kidd had six points, seven rebounds and nine assists before aggravating a strained neck that had forced him to miss his last four games with the Mavericks. He will sit out the next game and his status for next week is day-to-day.

At Detroit, Grant Hill had 29 points, eight rebounds and six assists as the Pistons snapped a season-

high three-game losing streak with a 97-75 rout of the Charlotte Hornets.

The Pistons avenged a 93-85 loss to Charlotte last month.

Anthony Mason and Glen Rice scored 17 points each for Charlotte, which has lost two in a row. The Hornets set a team low by scoring just seven points in the fourth quarter.

In Houston, Hakeem Olajuwon scored 10 of his 31 points in the fourth and Charles Barkley added 16 and 19 rebounds in the Rockets' 104-95 victory over the Golden State Warriors, who had their season-high three-game winning streak snapped.

Houston won its second straight following a season-high four-game losing streak.

At Minnesota, Tom Gugliotta scored 27 points and the Timberwolves held the Denver Nuggets without a field goal for 6 1/2 minutes en route to a 103-96 win in overtime.

The Wolves erased a five-point deficit by holding Denver scoreless in the final two minutes of regulation, then scored the first seven points of overtime to match the club record for consecutive wins.

In New York, Patrick Ewing scored 14 of his 17 points in the second quarter and the Knicks opened an 18-point lead, then held on for a 96-85 victory over the Orlando Magic.

Allan Houston added 17

points for the Knicks, who won for the 11th time in 13 games. Chris Childs scored 14 points, including two clutch jumpers after the Magic had cut the deficit to one point with just under four minutes to play.

Ex-Knicks Gerald Wilkins scored 21 points for the Magic.

At Utah, Karl Malone scored 29 points before being ejected as the Jazz defeated the Philadelphia 76ers for the ninth straight time, 110-84.

John Stockton had 17 points and 14 assists for the Jazz, who held the 76ers to 12 points in the third quarter.

Malone scuffled with Sixers forward Derrick Coleman in the first quarter and both received technical fouls. Late in the third period, Coleman blocked a layup by Malone, who argued after no foul was called and was ejected.

At Washington, Juwan Howard scored 25 points and grabbed 13 rebounds. Chris Webber scored 20 with nine boards and eight assists and George Murren had 18 points and 12 rebounds as the Bullets won their third straight, 97-86 over the Atlanta Hawks.

In Sacramento, Mitch Richmond scored 14 of his 27 points in the first quarter as the Kings raced to a 17-point lead and breezed to a 126-96 rout of the Boston Celtics.



NEW ZEALAND'S CLAUDIA RIEGLER PASSES A POLE: Austrian-born Claudia Riegler, who races for her mother's country New Zealand, passes a pole during the woman's World Cup slalom, Sunday. Riegler finished third with a time of 1:45.65 (Reuters photo)

Stimac: I get booked because I am Croatian

DERBY, England (AFP) — Derby captain Igor Stimac claimed on Sunday he is being victimised by English referees because he is Croatian.

The hardman defender hit out at his treatment by Premiership match officials after picking up his 10th booking of the season in the goalless draw against Blackburn on Saturday.

"Refs are looking out for me because I am a foreigner. They say he is Croatian, therefore he must be dirty and they look out for me with four eyes," fumed Stimac.

"I have had 10 bookings this season but for five or six of them I did nothing wrong," added Stimac. "I am not going to change the way I play. I am the way I am."

Stimac, who was sent off in Croatia's ill-tempered Euro 96 quarter-final clash with Germany, starts a two-match ban on New Year's day — his second suspen-

sion of the season — when Derby entertain Sheffield Wednesday.

He was shown his latest yellow card for a clash with Blackburn striker Chris Sutton who was also booked by notoriously disciplinary referee David Elleray.

But Stimac insisted: "We clashed and he said some things to me. I grabbed him by the throat and he went down."

"What I did was wrong but I am certain he was trying to get me sent off, there's no doubt about that."

"I am a defender and I have to stop strikers like Sutton and Alan Shearer. I am also the captain and my style is to put myself about a bit." Derby's fans chanted "cheat" at Sutton after he fell to the ground following the incident, but the striker insisted: "He pushed me in the face but I don't think he deserved to be sent off although I have seen players go for less."

Ronaldo grounded by Robson for New Year's Eve

BARCELONA (AFP) — Barcelona coach Bobby Robson is not letting his Brazilian star striker Ronaldo return home for New Year's Eve as punishment for missing a training session here on Saturday morning.

Ronaldo, a hot contender for this year's FIFA Player of the Year award, was due back at training at 10:00 local time, after passing out of the Brazilian World Cup winning squad in 1994.

But international flight delays meant that Ronaldo only arrived back in time to join the team for the afternoon training session.

Englishman Robson decided to schedule the 20-year old for a personal training session on Dec. 31 as a disciplinary measure.

Ronaldo will be joined by fellow Brazilian Giovanni, who has been reprimanded for the same reasons.

According to Spanish press, Ronaldo was intending to return to Brazil until the Spanish league got underway again on Jan. 4.

Only a week ago, Ronaldo opened fire on his coach Bobby Robson's methods in the local press, saying they had to change.

The 20-year old sensation indicated to journalists that he was much more at ease playing under the guidance of the Brazilian national coach Mario Zagallo.

At the time of the attack, Ronaldo, who was a member of the Brazilian World Cup winning squad in 1994, had not scored a goal in over a month in Spanish league. In 1994/95 he created a sensation in the Dutch Football League when he scored 30 goals in the season for PSV Eindhoven.

Robson, a former England coach who took charge in the summer, has come in for increasing criticism from disgruntled fans with Barca third in the table after losing to Real Madrid three weeks ago, a defeat which left their bitter rivals four points clear of the Catalan giants.

Nigeria contact high-profile names for manager job

LAGOS (R) — Nigeria have contacted top British and Dutch managers to interview and appoint one as trainer of their national team, a senior sports ministry official said.

"We have got in touch with high-profile managers like Kevin Keegan, Howard Wilkinson, Louis Van Gaal, Johan Cruyff and Albert Fafie to select one for the vacant position of manager of the Super Eagles," Danladi Bako, assistant director in the sports ministry, said on Saturday night.

Keegan and Van Gaal are respectively managers of English Premier League

Newcastle United and Dutch champions Ajax Amsterdam. Wilkinson, Cruyff and Fafie are currently without teams.

Local coach Amodu Shaibu, deputy to former manager Jo Bonfrere, has been training the Eagles since October when the Dutchman quit in acrimonious circumstances.

Bonfrere, alleging poor treatment and interference in his duties, said he had resigned after leading the Nigerians to the Atlanta Olympic title in August.

The Nigeria Football Association (NFA) disagreed, saying he still had one year left of his two-year contract.

Bako said the new manager would be employed by January, adding: "We are desperate to have a new manager to work with Shaibu. But the man to fill Bonfrere's position must be able to fit into and operate within the Nigerian situation."

"Our need for a high-profile coach is because we are also a high-profile soccer playing nation. It will be disastrous and criminal if we fail to qualify for the 1998 World Cup in France for our second World Cup outing."

Soccer is followed with passionate interest in Africa's most populous country of 100 million.

Nigeria, now preparing for an away World Cup qualifying game against Kenya on Jan. 11, are second in their group behind Guinea, who lead on superior goal difference.

Bako confirmed local newspaper reports that Nigerian-born former Wimbledon and Aston Villa striker John Fashanu had been asked to help persuade a manager to work in Nigeria.

"The job in Nigeria is beyond training players on the pitch. The manager will be involved in several other soccer-related duties," Bako said.

Their club symbol is a rampant bull, the Toro, but the beef is sadly missing. At the end of last season, after twice replacing their coach, Torino went down to Serie B.

The club has had its stars over the years — 1982 World Cup winning coach Enzo Bearzot was a stalwart in the 1950s while his World Cup star Francesco Graziani graced the club in the late 1970s — but fate continued to play cruel tricks.

In the 1960s brilliant Italy winger Gigi Meroni, the Roberto Baggio of his day, enthralled the home crowd.

Once again, tragedy took away Torino's finest. Meroni was killed by a speeding car in Turin in October 1967.

In November 1976, Giorgio Ferrini, assistant coach and former captain, died of illness aged 37.

"It has not been easy, nor will it be in future, to be a fan of Torino," said the daily Gazzetta Dello Sport.

The past dominates the exhibition, with photographs, shirts and personal effects of the "Grande Torino".

There is Mazzola's old leather suitcase and the silver plate, recovered dented from the crash wreckage, brought home by the players after the match against Benfica.

Old wooden ticket urns from the former Via Filadelfia Stadium, disused since 1963 but now the object of a supporters' campaign for it to be refurbished, stand behind glass.

The commemorative book shows great Torino players of the past, including fiery Scotland star Dennis Law — whose move from Manchester City for the then record sum of £100,000 in 1961 was a milestone in soccer transfers.

Law lasted one season before joining Manchester United but English international striker Jerry Hitchens was more successful, swiftly becoming Torino's top scorer.

The club was again involved in a record transfer in 1992 when Gianluigi Lentini was sold to AC

Milan. Torino fans rioted in the streets and stormed the club offices in protest.

Lentini moved but the curse of Torino followed. A year later he crashed his car and almost died. His career is only now starting to show signs of recovery at Atalanta.

Torino, after almost folding several times, are still some way off a similar recovery.

But the hope, like the pain, never vanishes. "I have learned what it means to be a Toro fan," said Napoli coach Luigi Simoni, a former Torino player who developed an attacking partnership with Meroni.

"The great misfortunes of Torino, those which make you suffer but also create a special bond. Those players who died at Superga became in some way all of Italy's sons."

And then there was the tragedy of Meroni, and that of Ferrini. They are things that leave a mark, but which make you love that claret shirt all the more for them."

Torino mark 90 years of triumph and tragedy

TURIN, Italy (R) — While all-conquering Juventus march on, city neighbours Torino are marking their 90th birthday with a simple display featuring old boots, dented silverware and wreckage from an air crash.

It may not sound like much but the smashed propeller, pock-marked wheel, battered leather suitcases and old photographs exhibited in the foyer of Turin's Regio Theatre are reminders of a team greater than any Juventus side.

They are also relics of a tragedy that still haunts the Italian club which was founded in December 1906 by two Swiss businessmen in a room over a beer hall.

In the same way that the 1958 Munich air crash left its mark on the history of Manchester United, the tragedy that still casts its shadow over Torino happened at five past five in the afternoon of May 4, 1949.

Returning from a friendly against Portugal's Benfica in Lisbon, the

entire Torino team died when their Fiat G-212 plane crashed into the 18th century Superga Basilica to the east of Turin while coming in to land in thick fog.

Eighteen players, 10 of them Italian internationals including the captain Valentino Mazzola, perished along with English coach Leslie Lievesley, officials and reporters.

All of Italy felt the loss of star players admired universally as "Il Grande Torino" (great Torino).

"They were a team unique to the world, invincible, capable of unrivalled exploits...The team was the symbol of an Italy still wounded by World War II but determined to redeem itself," narrates a 90th anniversary commemorative book.

Led by Mazzola, father of Inter and Italy great Alessandro Mazzola, Torino had won five consecutive league titles from 1943 to 1949 (the 1943-44 and 1944-45 seasons were cancelled) and provided most of the Italian national team.

They dominated Italy to such an extent that, playing against Ferenc Puskas's Hungary in a 1947 friendly, 10 of the 11 Italians on the pitch were from Torino. The 11th, goalkeeper Lucidio Sentimenti, was from Juventus. Italy won 3-2.

Cash-strapped and struggling compared with European and world club champions Juventus, Torino have few recent achievements to compare with those of the "old lady" which celebrates its 100th birthday next year.

"I would like to express one wish," Alessandro Mazzola wrote recently of Torino. "That under the Christmas tree you find that peace as a club which will allow you as soon as possible to become great again at the level you deserve."

They have won just one title, 20 years ago, since 1949. But the biggest success for a club which has traditionally boasted more support in Turin than Juventus, whose fans are dispersed across Italy, is that they still exist.

GOREN BRIDGE

WITH OMAR SHARIF & TAMMAM HIRSH
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WHAT DO YOU LEAD?

Both vulnerable. North deals.

NORTH
♠ A Q 8 7
♥ K 3
♦ A 8 6 5 3
♣ A J

WEST
♠ A 2
♥ A 9 8 4
♦ Q J 4
♣ 8 7 4 2

EAST
♠ Void
♥ Q J 10 7 5 2
♦ K 9 7
♣ K Q 6 3

SOUTH
♠ A K 10 9 6 5 4 3
♥ 8
♦ 10 9
♣ 10 5

The bidding:
NORTH EAST SOUTH WEST
1♣ 1♥ 1♠ 1♣
2♣ 2♥ 2♠ 2♣
3♣ 3♥ 3♠ 3♣
Pass Pass Pass Pass

Opening lead: Nine of ♠. There is a long-standing controversy about whether a defender, on lead against a slam with an ace, should lead it. We do not wish to enter into a discussion on the subject except to say that, if you are planning a key card for declarer anytime you don't make that lead. One of the few matches on record

where there is any substantial data to support an alternative salvo is the 1985 World Championship match between Great Britain and the United States. There were 12 slam deals during the match in which the defender on opening lead held an ace. On nine of these hands, attacking with the ace headed declarer the slam, which could not otherwise be made. Here is one deal.

The American auction allowed Boris Schapiro to double five clubs, hence Terence Reese chose a club as the opening lead. After that, there was no way for declarer to come to 12 tricks.

In the other room the American East had no opportunity to double five clubs on a less revealing auction, so West led the ace of hearts, then shifted to a club at trick two. Too late.

Declarer rose with the ace of clubs, drew one round of trumps with the king, then crossed to the ace of diamonds. A diamond was discarded on the king of hearts and a diamond was ruffed in the closed hand. Declarer entered dummy with a trump, ruffed another diamond to set up the suit, then used another trump as an entry to the table to discard the club loser on a good diamond. Making six odd.

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PHILADELPHIA "1"
Richard Gere...in
PRIMAL FEAR

Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:15, 8:30, 10:30

PHILADELPHIA "2"

The Jungle Book

Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:15, 8:30, 10:30

CINEMA TEL:699238

PLAZA

* The Hunchback
of Notre Dame

Shows: 10:30, 12:00, 1:30, 5:00

* RANSOM

Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:15, 8:45, 11:00

CINEMA TEL:677420

CONCORD

CONCORD "1"
Sharon Stone & Isabelle Adjani...in
DIABOLIQUE

Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:00, 8:15, 10:30

CONCORD "2"

INDEPENDENCE DAY

Shows: 3:30, 6:15, 8:30, 10:30

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Dec. 15, 1996 until the start
of the Holy Month of
Ramadan in order to prepare
for a new play entitled
"Al Aman Ya Ho"

Croatia off to great start in Hopman Cup tourney

PERTH, Australia (AFP) — Reigning champions Croatia overcame a major upset to give themselves a flying start in the A\$800,000 (U.S. \$640,000) Hopman Cup tennis mixed teams tournament here Sunday.

In the opening match of the eight-nation championship at Burswood Dome, Croatia clinched the deciding mixed doubles to beat Australia 2-1 in front of a

big holiday crowd.

Goran Ivanisevic and Iva Majoli teamed up skillfully to win the doubles, beating Mark Philippoussis and Nicole Pietrangeli 7-5, 7-5.

The doubles clash became critical after Philippoussis shocked Ivanisevic in the men's singles.

Philippoussis, a big 20-year-old right-hander, is ranked only 30th in the world — 26 places below his left-handed opponent.

Making light of an injured ankle, he beat the winner of 17 singles titles in just under an hour, 6-2, 6-3.

Majoli, ranked seventh in the world, had earlier needed only 67 minutes to overwhelm Bradtko, ranked 68th, in straight sets, 6-4, 6-3. The doubles developed into a tense struggle, with the Croatian pair keeping their composure in tight situations and displaying great character.

Barnes fires Liverpool five points clear

LONDON (AFP) — Liverpool went five points clear at the top of the English Premiership with a 1-0 win at Southampton on Sunday thanks to a brilliant piece of opportunism by their captain John Barnes.

The leaders, playing well below their best form, were heading towards a goalless draw when former England winger Barnes struck with just 13 minutes left on the clock.

Goalkeeper Dave Beasant had kept Liverpool at bay with a string of good saves until he made a crucial mistake when he raced to the right hand side of his area to clear an innocuous through-ball from Patrick Berger.

Instead of punting the ball into the safety of touch, the former Wimbledon keeper scuffed the ball upfield.

His clearance got only as far as Barnes who hit the ball instantly from about 35 yards into the back of the Southampton net with Beasant sprawling across the goalmouth in a desperate bid to rectify his error.

It was an unfortunate result for Southampton, whose manager Graeme Souness had come close to masterminding a victory against the club he graced as a player in the 1980s and managed in the early 1990s.

But defeat left Souness's side second from bottom after seven defeats in their

last eight games.

"We were lucky today, no doubt about it," conceded Barnes. "We did not really deserve to win."

"But I am delighted because it was these type of games that we were losing last year. This year the difference is that we are battling."

Barnes, though, was cautious about Liverpool winning their first championship since 1990.

"It's nice to be where we are now but there is still a long, hard slog from here," said Barnes, the only remaining player from the 1990 team.

"It is totally unpredictable this year because the so-

called lesser teams are much better organised and perfectly capable of beating any of the top teams, as they have been showing all season."

Earlier, former Southampton star Mark Wright came within a whisker of giving Liverpool the lead with a first-half header that hit the crossbar.

Robbie Fowler, Liverpool's top scorer with 17 goals, also missed a clear opportunity on 15 minutes when he opted to go it alone bar when the unmarked Stan Collymore, to Fowler's right, was in a far better position to score.

Southampton, with Matt le Tissier surprisingly left

on the bench in the first half, had plenty of possession themselves without ever really threatening a goal.

The appearance of Saints' hero le Tissier in the 58th minute was greeted with huge cheers and he was quick to impose himself on the game.

One volley, from 30 yards, brought a superb save from David James in the Liverpool goal.

James did even better 10 minutes later when he deflected a ferocious drive from Norwegian Egeil Ostensstad's and then denied Israeli Eyal Berkovic in the dying moments of the game.



Martina Hingis

16-year-old Hingis says ready to take top spot from Graf

PERTH, Australia (R) — Sixteen-year-old Martina Hingis said on Sunday she was ready to assume the top spot in women's tennis from Steffi Graf.

Hingis, from Switzerland, soared up the world rankings to end the 1996 season at number four following a remarkable string of results from September when she failed to make the final in only two of her last six tournaments.

"I hope it's not going to be that long a time to be number one," said Hingis, when asked if it would be another three years before she took over the top spot in the women's game.

Hingis begins her preparation for next month's Australian Open on Monday when she will pair up with Marc Rosset in the Hopman Cup mixed team event in Perth.

Hingis, who made her debut on the women's cir-

cuit at the age of 14, said she was confident she would not suffer the same ignominious fate of Americans Tracy Austin, Jennifer Capriati and Andrea Jaeger.

All three fell by the wayside after making bright starts to their careers at an early age.

"I am not Austin, Capriati or Jaeger. I am just myself and I have a different style of tennis and just go my way," she told reporters ahead of Switzerland's opening round match against Romania.

"Sometimes you see that they made a mistake in life. We have a great team and I always enjoy to play tennis, so I don't think it will be a big problem for me to stay like that."

Hingis credits her balanced frame of mind to her mother, Melanie, a former Czech champion.

"For me she always was the most important thing in my tennis," Hingis said.

"I hope it stays like that... she is not only my tennis coach, she is my mother and a terrific person and she has always been my biggest help during my career."

The right-hander stamped her mark on the game at last year's open in Melbourne when she advanced to the quarter-finals, but it was her end of year run which prompted Graf to predict the number one spot would soon be hers.

She won four final berths in her last five outings, winning her first singles title in October when she defeated Anke Huber in the Stuttgart final.

In the final event of the year, the WTA Championship, Hingis lost to Graf in an epic five-setter.

Pearce 'mentally exhausted' by job at Forest

NOTTINGHAM, England (AFP) — Stuart Pearce admitted on Sunday he feels mentally exhausted from his managerial duties — after just one week in the Nottingham Forest hot seat.

England defender Pearce, who took over as caretaker boss at the Premiership's bottom club following the resignation of Frank Clark, said the combination of playing, captaining and managing was starting to take its toll.

"I was aware when I went into the job how tough it would be — and nothing that has happened in the first week to suggest that I was wrong in my thinking," Pearce said.

"I think management in itself is tough but trying to combine it with playing as well is doubly hard. Sometimes you can have enough on your plate just getting yourself onto the football pitch without having to worry about the rest of the squad."

"But now I've got 12 or 13 others to worry about as well. I will go home worrying about Steve Chettle jarring his knee or Ian Woan being up ill all night and having six players who have got the hump because they are not in the side."

"It is mentally exhausting because I will go home now and am not stopping thinking about football. I will write down one team which I think is best for the next game and end up with 10 teams scattered all over the living room floor — and still wondering which is the best." Pearce reaffirmed his commitment to completing his full term as caretaker manager before making a decision on his future at the end of January.

He added: "When out on the pitch I find it very difficult in the heat of battle knowing who to bring on or off. I know what is going on in my segment of the pitch but it is a bit difficult to know what is going on elsewhere."

Pearce said he will speak to England manager Glenn Hoddle regarding his international commitments after his future at Forest is decided.

Morning Glory takes Hobart record

SYDNEY (R) — German maxi Morning Glory on Sunday broke the 21-year race record for the Sydney-to-Hobart, one of yacht racing's most elusive prizes, when she won line honours in the 630 nautical mile race.

The 24.5-metre maxi officially took 29 minutes 46 seconds off the record of two days, 14 hours 36 minutes and 56 seconds set by U.S. maxi Kialoa in 1975.

"We lost it three times and then we won it. It was a great win," said German owner Hasso Plattner after crossing the finish line in darkness at 3.07 a.m. Local (1607 GMT, Saturday) on the Derwent River in Tasmania.

Morning Glory boasted some of the world's best sailors, including victorious America's Cup helmsman Russell Coutts of New Zealand.

Plattner said: "We had a terrible start but we recovered from that. Then we ran into a southerly front...and had to lower the mainsail because the leech line broke. At one stage we were 10 (nautical) miles behind (the leader) Exile."

"Then we approached Tasmania and everything was looking good and then the wind died again," said the German industrialist. "I couldn't stand it. I went below and looked at the

computer for a while — the crew never gave up."

After being becalmed late on Saturday off the mid-east coast of Tasmania, Morning Glory, skippered by Barry McKay, picked up a strong 19 knot southwesterly headwind in the early hours of Sunday to surge up the Derwent.

In the chilly darkness and surrounded by a score of

lead yacht has been well within the race record charging down the Tasmanian coast, only to be becalmed and robbed of the record.

Plattner collected A\$300,000 (US\$237,000) for breaking the record, the richest prize money for a record-breaking line honours win in a single ocean race.

He said he would give the

YACHTING

spectator boats, the Australian-built but German-owned maxi powered away, with Plattner at the helm, tacking twice before crossing the line and breaking the record.

Hong Kong pocket maxi Exile finished second, some three hours later, followed by Australian maxi Amazon in fourth and the newly launched cruiser-racer Sydney, helmed by Australian America's Cup veteran Iain Murray, in fifth. The remaining 73 boats were stretched along the Tasmanian coast.

The race record had stood for so long mainly because of the unpredictable winds off Tasmania's east coast and in the final run up the Derwent.

In the past two years the

money to the crew.

The win and record by Morning Glory represent a remarkable comeback for the German maxi, which broke her mast only days before the start on Thursday, forcing a frantic mission to fly in a replacement from New Zealand.

Morning Glory was also one of 25 boats forced back to the starting line after a premature start and then survived 40 knot southerly gales which snapped masts and shredded sails of some of the race favourites only hours after the start.

Morning Glory was the only overseas maxi competing in the race. Although built in Sydney in 1995, she had not raced in Australia before.

The maxi won the Cape Town to Rio in January, but

had suffered a jinx since then, breaking her mast three times — during the Kenwood Cup in Hawaii, the Big Boat Series off San Francisco and again before the Sydney-to-Hobart.

Morning Glory, which at times powered along at 15 knots compared with Kialoa's average 10 knots, sailed a strategic race. After the false start, the crew sailed conservatively through the battered fleet to take the lead on the first night.

As the gales continued, Morning Glory reduced her mainsail three times before finally lowering it because of equipment failure.

The replacement mast had already been broken and repaired twice before and skipper McKay said before the start that he would not push Morning Glory to the limit.

By Friday, pocket maxi Exile had taken the lead in easing conditions, but as the wind swung around to a northeasterly tailwind Morning Glory hoisted her huge spinnaker and regained the lead on Saturday.

With the record in sight on Saturday night, the wind dropped, leaving Morning Glory bobbing up and down like a cork.

But unlike previous years, luck was on her side.

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2) Fiat Uno 1992 (like new, white), 32,000 km. - 4,000 U.S. dollars

Tel: 622611 office hours.

Romania's coach gets ministry job

BUCHAREST (R) — Romania's former soccer coach Emeric Jenei has been appointed secretary of state at the youth and sports ministry, the state news agency Rompres said on Sunday.

"This is a serious challenge for me and I am determined to do my best in the new job," Jenei said by telephone from his home town of Oradea. Jenei, 60, guided Steaua Bucharest to their European Cup triumph in 1986 and also took Romania to the 1990 World Cup finals in Italy. He coached Hungary in 1991 and 1992 and now manages Romanian first division team Universitatea Craiova.

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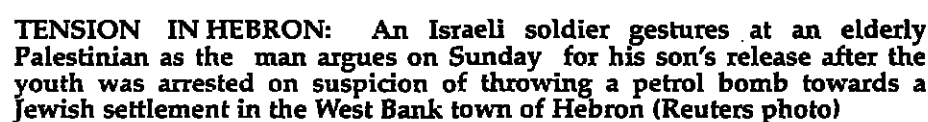
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SANAA (Agencies) — The Yemeni authorities held fresh negotiations on Sunday for the release of five Polish tourists being held by tribesmen who killed three policemen staking out their mountain hideout, diplomats said.

"We received official notification from the (Yemeni) Interior Ministry today (Sunday) that the kidnapped people are Polish," Ambassador Krzysztof Suprowicz told Reuters.

"They told us negotiations are still continuing with the kidnappers and they affirmed that an imminent release will take place," he said.

Mr. Suprowicz said he had no further details.

"All we are concerned about is...that the Yemeni authorities reach a peaceful settlement of this problem soon," he said.

"The negotiations are continuing between the authorities and the kidnappers through MPs (members of parliament) and tribal leaders," said Stanislas Smolin, the counsellor at the Polish embassy.

Mr. Smolin told AFP Polish Yemeni nor Polish embassy officials have seen the five Poles since they were kidnapped by Beni Jabr tribesmen on Thursday while driving to an archaeological site at Marib in the east of the country.

Three policemen were killed and five others wounded Saturday when tribesmen fired an anti-tank rocket at police officers surrounding them, witnesses said. Two all-terrain vehicles were also destroyed by the rocket.

Some 500 members of a special police unit have encircled the abductors in the mountains some 60 kilometres east of Sanaa, the Yemeni capital.

"We hope for an early solution," Mr. Smolin said.

The Poles, three men and two women aged in their 50s and 60s, arrived in Yemen on Dec. 11 and had asked the Polish embassy for help in obtaining visas for Ethiopia, Djibouti, Eritrea and Sudan, Mr. Smolin said.

"We know them. They came to the embassy and we helped them process visa applications," he added. "I can confirm it's a group of Polish tourists. It has been confirmed to us by the authorities."

Police reported earlier that the hostages were Dutch tourists.

According to tribal sources in the region, leaders of the Beni Jabr tribe have urged the commander of the police unit to take five members of the tribe into custody and lift the siege of the kidnappers' hideout.

The offer was refused, however, and the police commander is insisting that the kidnappers give themselves up and release the hostages, the sources said.

They said that tension was high in the region amid fears that warfare could erupt between the security forces and the Beni Jabr and allied tribes.

According to a police spokesman, the kidnappers are seeking to put pressure on the government to obtain financial compensation for damage done by flooding in June.

"We express our concern and interest in their release because of their age and humanitarian reasons," Mr. Smolin said. "The authorities are nicely cooperating with us but not disclosing details."

Kidnapping foreigners has become a common practice in Yemen by tribes seeking government money to develop oil resources on their territory or for the construction of roads and other infrastructure.

Previous kidnappings have ended peacefully, however.

Yemeni authorities foiled an attempt on Dec. 19 by armed tribesmen in the north to kidnap five Dutch tourists.

In Jan. 17 French tourists were kidnapped and held hostage by tribesmen in Yemen for four days before they were freed.

A French diplomat was kidnapped twice in October, first in Sanaa and then in the Marib region. He was released unharmed both times.

DUBAI (Agencies) — Saudi newspapers said on Sunday that two British nurses charged with murdering an Australian colleague in Saudi Arabia had confessed to the crime.

The Arab News and the London-based Al Hayat dailies said in separate reports that Deborah Kim Parry, 41, and Lucille McLauchlan, 31, confessed to murdering Australian nurse Yvonne Gilford, 55, soon after they were arrested on Dec. 20, nine days after Gilford was found stabbed and beaten to death.

British officials refused to discuss the details of the case or comment on whether the two nurses had made confessions. The foreign office in London also declined to comment.

Al Hayat quoted police officers investigating as saying one of the two confessed immediately after the arrest.

while the other confessed two days later.

Western diplomats in the Gulf said the nurses were escorted to the scene of the crime at the King Fahd military medical complex in the eastern Saudi city of Dhahran on Dec. 23 where they renounced the crime to Saudi investigators.

The arrest of the two is diplomatically sensitive as they could be executed by the sword in public under the strict Islamic laws in Saudi Arabia, the diplomats said.

They said they did not recall when a Westerner was last executed in Saudi Arabia, where they estimated that about 11 women — including Saudis and Asians — had been executed in the last three years. They said they recalled at least one case when a woman was executed by firing squad and not beheaded.

"Under Sharia law there are several options for murderers, either execution, a pardon by the king...or the suspects paying blood money to the victims' family which would spare them the death sentence," one diplomat said.

The British embassy had said the case documents were with the governor of Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province. It is up to his office to decide what to do with the case. The diplomats said British Ambassador Andrew Green had met the governor.

The Saudi newspapers said the two British women were arrested while using the victim's automatic teller machine cash card at a shopping mall in Al Khobar near Dhahran.

Al Hayat said the police found only one fingerprint of one of the British nurses at Gilford's flat. All other fingerprints were the victim's.

TEL AVIV (Agencies) — Tens of thousands of Israeli workers walked off their jobs Sunday, shutting down banks, government offices and radio and television stations and causing chaos at the airport.

The strike ended after about five hours when authorities agreed to drop a contempt-of-court order against a top union leader. Another widespread strike was scheduled for Monday to protest proposed budget cuts and the government's privatisation plans.

Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu said the strike by the Histadrut trade union, long affiliated with the opposition Labour Party, was "politically motivated."

"This country does not belong to the trade union," he said on Israeli Radio, where he appealed to workers to ignore the strike call. "This is an irresponsible, politically motivated strike."

Israel Radio itself went off the air except for hourly news bulletins. The water, electric and telephone companies were working on an emergency basis only.

At Ben Gurion International Airport, planes landed and passengers disembarked but could not get their luggage. Boards listing departing flights flashed "delayed," and passengers' suitcases piled up inside the terminal, while hundreds of passengers milled around the terminal, waiting for information.

Passengers cheered when a loudspeaker announcement at 5 p.m. — five hours after the strike began — said that flights would resume.

Histadrut head Amir Peretz called the strike after police arrested top union official Shlomo Shani on Sunday for failing to show up in court on charges of violating a court order restricting a strike last week to three hours. That

AMMAN (J.T.) — A Jordanian official on Sunday welcomed an Israeli statement that the Jewish state would consider a proposal made by His Majesty King Hussein to grant a special status in Jerusalem to the world's three major monotheistic religions and their holy sites.

"Israel's willingness to consider the King's proposal to begin a dialogue between representatives of the three religions on the special status of Jerusalem and its holy places is positive and encouraging," said the official quoted by Agence France Presse.

The official was commenting on a statement made by Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy and carried by the Yediot Aharonot newspaper that "we will consider King Hussein's proposal after the implementation of the agreement on a military redeployment from Hebron" on the West Bank.

"King Hussein has proposed a meeting of Muslim, Christian and Jewish leaders to discuss a special status for Jerusalem and for its holy places," Mr. Levy added on Israeli radio on Sunday.

The Jordanian official was quoted as saying by the AFP that for several years now King Hussein has stressed the necessity that the holy city be "a symbol of peace and given a special status for Muslims, Christians and Jews, but his appeals did not strike a chord within Israel."

The King called in September for the formation of an international commission on the holy sites in Jerusalem after Israel opened a new entrance to an archeological tunnel outside the Al Aqsa compound, which set off a storm of protest in the Palestinian territories.

The ensuing clashes between Israeli troops and Palestinian protestors and police left 86 people dead.

The compound and its vicinity contain sites holy to all three religions.

The Jordanian official told AFP that during talks with Mr. Levy in Amman this month, the King again brought up the proposal.

The U.S., the main sponsor of the Middle East peace process and the closest Israeli ally, has not publicly commented on the proposal. The British government has welcomed the idea.

In his comments on Sunday, Mr. Levy said King Hussein "is very concerned that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict not become a religious conflict and raised the proposal again during my latest meeting with him."

Mr. Levy emphasised that, as far as Israel was concerned, the proposal was not aimed at turning Jerusalem into a "capital for the three religions" and reiterated that Israel would not give up any degree its claim to sovereignty over the city.

Israeli and Palestinian negotiators are expected to wrap up an agreement this week on an Israeli military withdrawal from Hebron, the last major West Bank city under Israeli occupation.

The status of Jerusalem is to be discussed between Israeli and Palestinian negotiators as part of discussions on the final status of the Palestinian territories scheduled to conclude by May 1999.

Jordan, which continues to maintain its role as the guardian of Islamic holy places in Jerusalem, fully supports the Palestinian demand for the return of Arab East Jerusalem as the capital of an independent Palestinian state.

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By a Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — The Jordan Press Association (JPA) on Sunday joined the chorus of calls for boycotting an Israeli trade exhibition by urging the Kingdom's press establishments and journalists to refrain from covering the event and to call on the general public to stay away from the fair.

A memo signed by the board of the JPA and sent to all press organisations in Jordan said the association's stand against the Jan. 6-9 exhibition stemmed "from an overwhelming national rejection of the idea" of holding such an event in Jordan.

It cited "the Israeli authorities' disregard for Arab rights, escalation of criminal practices against the Palestinian people and aggression on southern Lebanon," as the basis for its call for boycotting the event.

"The Jordan Press Association is asking you to boycott this exhibition, refrain from publishing anything about the event or visiting it yourself," said the memo, urging the press establishments and journalists also ask the public to be committed to a "total boycott" of the exhibition.

It was not immediately possible to determine how the call was received by the press establishments and journalists.

A JPA board member said the decision to issue the call was taken at a board meeting on Sunday after the organisers of the exhibition sent invitations to press establishments and journalists to attend the event after obtaining special passes.

"The JPA board does not intend to take any punitive action against its members who cover the event," said the board member, pointing out that reporters, including those of the state-owned media, had no choice but to report on the exhibition if asked to do so by their employer.

"It will be unfair for the JPA to adopt any action against those who cannot make their own decision," noted the JPA board member.

The organisers of the exhibition have said they are going ahead with the project despite opposition from Jordanian political activists and businessmen associations.

Opponents of normalisation of ties with Israel have set up a "national Jordanian committee for cancelling the Israeli trade fair," and are threatening Jordanians who attend with blacklisting.

Ahmad Obeidat, a former prime minister who heads the committee, said Saturday the group includes Parliament members, political parties, trade unionists, women's groups and human rights organisations.

The committee will create a blacklist of participants, including reporters who cover the event, Mr. Obeidat told the Associated Press.

"The blacklist will be accessible to all Arab organisations to boycott all those who seek to normalise relations with Israel," Mr. Obeidat said.

He also said his group will form a "human chain" outside the fair to prevent people from entering.

Mr. Obeidat called the event "a big threat to our economy."

"It will kill our national industries and close the door in the face of cooperation with Arab markets," he said. "The fair is a political, economic and cultural invasion and we will not surrender to that."

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AMMAN (J.T) — A University of Jordan student was arrested in downtown Amman on Sunday after he tried to hijack a tourist bus at knife-point in what he told police was a bid to ensnare a Austrian female tour guide, police said. The student, identified as Mohammad Droubi, 23, "harassed the tour guide who was accompanying an Austrian group on a visit to the Roman Amphitheatre in downtown Amman and followed her to the tour bus," a police source said. The student entered the bus and pulled out a knife and tried to "hijack" the bus when the tour guide resisted his overtures, according to the source. "Passengers and bystanders overpowered the youth and handed him over to police," said the source. The youth "confessed to have fallen in love with the tour guide and said he was trying to kidnap her after hijacking the bus," the source added. The youth remained in custody and is expected to be prosecuted, the source said.

NASHVILLE, Tennessee (AP) — Maybe the baker was religiously inspired. Or perhaps it's a miracle. Nashville-style. One thing's for sure, the cinnamon bun bears an uncanny likeness to Mother Teresa. Ann Loree, manager of the Bongolava coffeehouse near Belmont University, said a customer bought the bun in October. "He was about to take a bite out of his bun, and then he saw the image," she said Friday. Customer after customer recognised the revered nun in the folds of Flaky Pastry. So out of a sense of awe—or perhaps marketing potential — coffeehouse workers shellacked it and enshrined the cinnamon nun bun in a counter display, where it remains. The management has printed up "miracle bun" T-shirts and prayer cards, and a video of the bun is being pitched to late-night TV shows.

MISHAWAKA, Indiana (AP) — Because of Parkinson's disease, Mohammad Ali, cannot always verbally communicate his beliefs, but with the help of writer Thomas Hauser, he can put them on paper. Ali, 54, co-wrote "Healing: A Journal of Tolerance and Understanding" with Hauser. He was expected to make a promotional appearance Sunday at a bookstore in Mishawaka, where the Michiana Boys choir will also perform. "For a number of years, Mohammad talked about all the hate in the world and how he wanted to do something about it," Hauser said. "Healing" really grew out of Mohammad's desire, and mine, to make a statement about this age-old problem. What we've tried to do is put down a philosophy that all people of good will can embrace."

ROME (R) — Burglars stole an Oscar and other awards belonging to Italian film director Michelangelo Antonioni during Christmas newspapers reported. "I would like to make an appeal to the thieves: Give back to Michelangelo the history of this life," the director's wife Enrica Fico was quoted as telling the daily *La Repubblica*. The newspaper said Burglars had broken into 84-year-old Antonioni's Rome apartment while he was away during Christmas, stealing the Oscar he was awarded in 1995 for his career achievement and prizes won at the Cannes and Venice film festivals. Antonioni, perhaps best known for his 1967 film "Blow Up," was on holiday in Venice at the time of the burglary.

MANAMA (AFP) — Bahrain and Qatar tried Sunday to repair crumbling ties after the government in Manama pardoned two Qataris convicted of espionage and sentenced to three years in prison.

The emir of Bahrain pardoned the Qataris "to underline his desire to maintain privileged and brotherly ties between the peoples of Bahrain and Qatar."

Information Minister Ibrahim Mutaiwa announced Saturday.

The decision by the emir, Sheikh Isa Ben Salman Al Khalifa, came after the pair asked for a pardon and "expressed regret for the actions they had committed against Bahrain."

A Bahraini court on Wednesday sentenced Fahd Abdullah Al Bakker, alleged to be a Qatari intelligence officer, and Salwa Jassim Mahomoud Fakhri, a woman he reportedly recruited as a spy, to three years in prison for spying.

Bahrain arrested the pair Dec. 2 and accused them of collecting information about "military sites, armaments and the Hawar islands" in the Gulf — the subject of a decades-old territorial dispute between the two countries.

Bahrain Foreign Minister, Mohammad Ben Mubarak Al Khalifa said after talks Sunday with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in Cairo that Gulf Arab ministers would meet in Riyadh Jan. 6 to try to resolve their dispute.

Qatari Foreign Minister, Sheikh Hamad Ben Jassim Ben Jabr Al Thani said in Cairo, meanwhile, that Doha was willing to discuss "any pending" issue with Bahrain except for the territorial dispute.

Sheikh Hamad also dismissed the significance of the pardon saying it was "a play which is now over."

Al Raya newspaper, which reflects Qatar's official view, said that Qataris were "relieved" with the pardon which it described as "a step in the right direction."

But it criticised "the attitude of influential groups in the government who are attacking officials in Qatar" and said the "territorial dispute between the countries does not require all this saber rattling and threats."

In Manama, newspapers close to the government also expressed the hope that the pardon would narrow the rift between the two countries.

Bahrain is angry at Qatar for taking the territorial dispute to the International Court of Justice at the Hague, although it finally agreed in September to submit its own case to the court.

Bahrain says the dispute should be resolved among Gulf states.

In Kuwait City, the official KUNA news agency said the Kuwaiti cabinet also "welcomed the Bahraini emir's wise decision to free the two Qataris and hoped it will dissipate the cold between the two brotherly countries."

"The cabinet welcomed this initiative which represents a blessed step towards removing the incidental disagreement between the brothers in Qatar and Bahrain," an official statement said, adding the cabinet had received Sheikh Isa's decision with "extreme relief and optimism."

The cabinet statement also hoped for "a solution to efforts aimed at settling the dispute" between the two neighbours over the Hawar islands.